

IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING

HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD.





N. E. Long
S. Bernardine
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IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING.

The Story of a Hidden Life.

BY
THE HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD,

AUTHOR OF
'LADY GRIZEL,' 'MY LORDS OF STROGUE,' ETC.

'Recompense Injury with Justice, and Kindness with Kindness.'
CONFUCIUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING.

PART I.—*continued.*

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG WARDER REPENTS.



HE good major was always inclined to placidity after an interview with his most hopeful prisoner; therefore I, being the next on the roll, escaped with a reprimand. Scarraweg, true to his word, had used his authority with his junior, and the complaint made was merely one of talking; so the governor rapped out an edifying little discourse, and sent me about my business. He said he was glad to see in me a slight change for the better. When I

first came, my record was of the blackest, but latterly my transgressions had been trivial, and I had only misbehaved myself in small matters.

‘I observe with pleasure,’ he concluded, ‘that you are less morose than you were at first; less inclined to secret brooding, which can only have a bad result. I have perceived, too, that chance has thrown you a good deal, during your Sunday walks, in the way of the man who has just gone out, and that you have not repelled his advances. This speaks well for you, for he is quiet and steady—of a contented disposition—a striking example of prison reformation—and will doubtless do us credit when he goes out.’

Instead of displaying gratitude, in that the major had stooped to study me, I gave way to a derisive chuckle, and he stared with an offended frown, while Scarraweg shook his head. I was essentially a man of moods, and my moods in many instances were altogether beyond control. To save myself from the triangles, I could not have helped laughing in the governor’s face when he showed how little he understood us, though I knew he would resent the impertinence on the next

occasion when I should be brought up for judgment. In the solitude of my own cell I laughed again as I thought it over—a bitter cachinnation, devoid of merriment, like the snapping of a skull's jaws which are set on springs. And again in the night I laughed, as, lying awake, I started when the bull's-eye flashed, and listened to the muffled tread of the night-patrol in his list slippers, and the gentle breathing of the guileless Jaggs through the partition of corrugated iron. It was all grimly funny. What could be more droll than this blustering but kind-hearted governor, who pretended to be a fire-eater, and prided himself on his knowledge of men? He meant well, though he was for ever spying through secret chinks; yet the fact that he should cultivate that habit showed how false was his estimate of human nature, and how unfit he was for his position. With regard to the convicts under his care, he was rarely in possession of *la clef de l'énigme*, and consequently could do little else than blunder. It was funny how inconsistent he was; at one moment declaring that felons and warders alike were a race predestined to serfdom; at

another, holding up as a model of reform one whose crimes were of unusual baseness. For I judged from what had passed that it must be so, and that the parson had lied to me as well as to the rest.

The leonine chief-warder, too, was in his way grotesque. He read Tilgoe like a book, and reckoned him up for one of the meanest men in the whole prison ; but he did not know that in the silence of his den he was weaving a secret web of dastardly and subtle vengeance. He did not know that he was plaiting ingenious paragraphs of falsehood, of which 'taxpayer' was to be the keynote. Had he known that, there is little doubt but that he would have made it warm for him, and for a moment I felt half inclined to drop a hint. There was something so very mean about it, something so disagreeably like the proceedings of the midnight bravo, that I considered I should have been justified in warning Mr. Scarraweg. But then I remembered that it is the way of convicts to peach one upon another on the sly, and I still shrank from being identified with my companions down to this lowest depth. 'No,' I thought,

‘ he will achieve release by-and-bye, and have his fling possibly for a while. Yet surely his malice renders him too sanguine. The public, as a body, are [gifted with common-sense. Are they likely to accept so ridiculous a position as that the basest of the base should sit in judgment on their betters? Will they for a moment permit rascals who have been proved guilty of hideous offences idly to impeach gentlemen of high standing and blameless reputation? Will they believe the anonymous felon, without strongly-established proof, when he blandly assures them that he has “made a little slip,” and is “more sinned against than sinning?” No. Mr. Bull could not be so misguided; he could not so gratuitously insult those whom he has placed in command of his prisons—officers who have served him faithfully through a lengthened military career, who have won for themselves names and decorations upon many a hard-fought field! The proposition was too grotesque. In this instance Tilgoe’s ingenuity had run away with him. He will spin out his lies,’ I reflected, ‘and weave his fabrications, only to be caught in his own

net. Curiosity may induce people to peruse what he has written, then, laughing, they will lay it down. And after that will come retribution.' The governor distinctly let drop that though only one charge had been investigated, there had been a dozen more standing against the parson. This was not his first sentence either. He had lied to me from the beginning to the end. The criminal career of such a miscreant was not likely to conclude in middle life. In time he would be certain to return to prison ; and then, with governors, warders, all, arrayed against him by a personal grudge, it would not be pleasant to occupy his shoes ! The last state of that felon would certainly be worse than the first. No amount of cant would save him. I rather hoped that when the time should come, I might be there to see. And yet I didn't, for it would be best for him to go to Chatham, there to break his back under the eye of retributive guardians, in the oozy mud, without hope of privilege or favour, or mercy.

Ah, me ! When would that time come ? And, supposing him to return to Dartmoor,

would he find me lingering still, or gone to rest? Tempest-tossed and worn out by alternations of despair and callousness, I really showed signs of becoming genuinely indifferent as to the future. My moods varied as they were influenced either by retrospect and the determination, for the sake of my child's future, never to be set free; or by the revulsion caused by some sally of my comrades which was more brutal and more revolting than usual.

It seemed probable that the term of my life would be a hundred instead of three score years and ten. I never felt better in my life than I did at Dartmoor, for the brisk air and exercise suited my constitution. In similar ratio as the mental power wanes from disuse, so often does the body flourish. I threatened to become altogether bovine and fleshly, like an ordinary day-labourer; and then by fits and starts a veil was rent in twain, and I saw the grim vast future in all its monotonous horror. Quaking then with dismay, I tore my flesh with my fingers, as I used to do in the first despairing throes of anguish, and cursed my health and iron

muscles. Why was I not like Miffy, frail and weak? Were not hundreds of opulent but feeble men rushing from place to place in search of health to enjoy the riches which surrounded them? Why could not I give them mine, and make an exchange which would be a boon to both? Often as I tossed in the melancholy watches, I wondered how time passed—and yet why should I? Time and I could have no connection any more. The intervening space betwixt me and the end was a dreary blank which could have no real interest. But, as a matter of curiosity, I did wonder, now and then, whether it was weeks, or days, or years, since first I joined the wretched band upon this barren heath. Crusoe calculated the time by means of a notched stick. My comrades kept records in all kinds of ways. I had no calendar, for the gradual approach of distant months whispered no hope to such as I. I tried to tell off the weeks by the labour done. We had dragged from the quarry's flanks great heaps of rock—immense heaps. Surely it must be years since I entered my iron cell. How many? Was it six, or ten, or even more? My little

Mildred must be a great girl now—tall and slender and beautiful. Yes, beautiful; for of course she did not disappoint the promise of early childhood. She had put off her mourning ages since, and dried her tears. She was very happy.

As I contemplated her, my heart seemed to grow still, to flutter less and less strongly against the bars which prisoned it. My mind basked in the glory of her golden hair, and ceased to fret—calmed by some mystic agency. For her sake I had laid down my identity whilst still alive, had denied myself the rapture of her embrace. Of a surety that sacrifice would be counted as part of an atonement. Lo! it was counted as such already. My pulse was imperceptible—I was in a daze—and I thanked God for His goodness, for I felt I must be dying! And then across the primrose vision came a shade, and the dreamer was rudely recalled to earth. It was the shadow of her mother, stern and harsh. What if she were cruel to my darling? What if—— Oh no! no! The thought that the sacrifice might be in vain was maddening. The insidious thought that per-

chance she was miserable and yearned after her father—the idea that it might, perhaps, be better for her even to know that he was a felon and alive, than be crushed by a desolating sense of solitude. Then I would start up and gnaw my nails and pace my small domain, and strike my palms against the wall, till knocks from Jaggs would recall me to myself, or the passing patrol would warn me to be silent. These transitions told that the fire was not quenched, but smouldering. My mind was like an open magazine. Would a match ever be applied, or was it to remain dark and black and harmless? It takes seven years, they say, for the tissues of a man's body to be changed. How long was it to be ere my inner nature could be entirely transformed?

My daughter and my wife. They would persist in haunting me, strive as I would to blot out their image. Engrossed by the hurry of the world's affairs, they must have ceased long since to think of me. Why could I not bury them in a like oblivion? To them I was like a letter tossed upon the hearth—a letter scrawled all over, crossed

and recrossed with words. A flame curls round it, and it smokes and darkens and cracks into small fissures; then flares and is consumed and shrinks, and, after that, burns to a ghastly white. No vestige of the pretty sentiments remain; they are clean wiped out, as with a sponge. Having passed through the ordeal of the fire, all is blank and ashen, and then crumbles into dust impalpable, and vanishes. So was it with me and mine. I had passed from their sight for ever in this world. How long would they remember me, and why should I desire to be remembered?

But for these occasional waves, of despair or of despondency, which grew rarer and more rare as time went on, I became more and more like a cog in a great wheel. When unstirred by pictures of the past, I was simply hard and indifferent. To one as desolate as I, it mattered not how often I was punished. What were gibes and revilings to one who had been so racked? How right was Jaggs to take things so easily; how wise was Tilgoe when he exhorted me to make the best of a bad job! My heart was hard and heavy, like a big stone within my breast. Evil-doing

is contagious. Jagg's maxims were amusing, those of the Rev. Aurelius were edifying. Virtue is out of place in an assemblage of convicts. From our point of view, as offenders against the law, whose offending henceforward (by the world's decree) must perforce be chronic, it was well that we should unite to form a happy family, and make ourselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit. Tilgoe was perfectly right to have inveigled the young jackanapes into his power, and it was vastly entertaining to watch how that hapless person fretted under his tyranny. Miffy and I, who were not in the compact, endured the full brunt of his domineering temper without murmuring. Miffy was too jaded and too crushed for revolt. For my part, the young warder's barbs flew harmless over my head. The peach-faced swaggerer was not the match which was to explode my magazine.

That all-conquering discipline! What an overwhelming, overriding car of Juggernaut! I see the dissolving view before me now of the iron yoke under which we bowed twice daily. There was no fear of our forgetting

that we were wild animals, treacherous creatures who might not be trusted for a moment. Returned from the quarry, we stood in files for searching, as we had done before going thither a few hours before; then we were marched in squads into our halls, each animal retiring to his den and shutting-to his door till feeding-time. But the animals might be up to tricks; they might not be trusted even so far. Two or even three might be huddled in one den, and who could premise what they might there be plotting? Such a possibility must be prevented; so the doors were no sooner closed than each warder in charge passed down his landing, tapping at every door; in reply to which summons the beast within was expected to growl, 'Ay, sir!' At first this system revolted and offended me, but as I became callous I grew used to it, and seeing what I did of my companions, while their characters were disclosing themselves, I could not but acquiesce in the expediency of the arrangement.

The bleak moor on which we laboured turned green, then russet-red, then sable, and then white—how often? I took no heed,

nor cared. It rained sometimes incessantly for weeks together, as though a new deluge was to drown us. The mists came down and wrapped us like a shroud, and then it seemed as if we were hung away in space, far removed from earth. For days and days sometimes did the fogs hang upon the plain, and being kept cooped within the walls, we enjoyed a rest from bodily exertion. I dreaded these times, for, deprived of exercise, the past preyed on me with disastrous effect ; but it was not so with Jaggs or Soda, both of whom detested the quarry, preferring to make a pretence of furbishing up the corridors, or of picking oakum within their dens.

Our quarrying party remained much the same. Jaggs laboured with me as often as he could, for I recked not whether he did his quantum or left me to bear the brunt. Sometimes we had a sprinkling of yellow men, sometimes of weakly ones, who struggled and broke down, and were drafted to the shops, leaving Jaggs torn by envy. His hands, in spite of all precautions, were now as horny as my own, and would require long training before they could resume their

suppleness. Did it not seem cruel that a master of legerdemain should have his stock-in-trade broken, as it were, piecemeal? It required the exercise of all his philosophy to keep his spirits and his temper in trim, and many an hour of private contemplation was employed by him in scheming how Scarraweg might be circumvented.

Where changes were so few, and each week so like its neighbour, tiny ripples on our ocean seemed to us huge waves. There was a change gradually creeping into the relations of Miffy with his patron, which exercised me no little, for lack of something better wherewith to occupy my faculties. The unlucky stealer of stamps was become the very bondsman of Soda, without will of his own, or even desire to have a will. Before he was a faithful dog; now he was a doomed rabbit, watching with equanimity the serpent who was about to devour him; and as he sank deeper and deeper under the fascination, so did his nervousness seem to increase and his wits to melt. Indeed, the burly scoundrel had his own way in the quarry, and evaded work in quite a remarkable

degree ; establishing a reign of terror there from which I only appeared to be exempted. Between him and me there was a sort of armed neutrality. He knew perfectly well that I would stand no nonsense, and that if it were to come to a trial of strength, I probably should come off the victor. This in itself was sufficient motive for the respect of a coward and a bully ; and, despite my early delinquencies, he elected to be still extremely friendly when he discovered that I did not intend to interfere with him. It was only to be expected that a gentleman lag would be guilty of deplorable laches until taught better. I had begun well, then had fallen away into semi-propriety, but now was improving again ; and therefore it was only fair that the probationer in sin should be encouraged. It was a pity that I should be so inconsistent—such a chameleon as to moods—but that, doubtless, would be changed in course of time, long before the twenty years were up when Mr. Soda was to make his bow. My intimacy, too, with the astute parson, of whom he stood in awe, did much to increase his surly deference, so we

exchanged a nod or a remark, and worked sometimes side by side, and neither his broad jests not yet his foul language offended his comrade any more. But it was curious that Miffy should be so utterly under the thumb of such as he. Everyone remarked the fact as well as I, and also that the devotion of the postmaster had certainly not been won by kindness. Even the purblind old Scripture-reader saw it, and warned his *protégé* more than once. But he was beyond warning. I once inquired of him myself wherein the fascination lay; but he merely rubbed his brow as if it ached, and looked furtively at Soda in his vacant weary way. That his slavery was involuntary was evident, for he seemed always to be expecting a blow, and when he got one (which was often enough) he would draw out his old scraps of letters and croon over the well-known lines for comfort. As may be supposed, his patron, who since the tragical end of Blackbeetle Bet had flouted the idea of constancy, was little softened by such an exhibition of maudlin feebleness. On the contrary, he was wont to rate his serf and gibe at his home relations,

and encourage others to do likewise. Was his wife pretty—was she young—was she delicate? Did he expect to find her re-married on his exit, and mother of how many new brats? Under which interrogatory Miffy would shrink and cower and reply in monosyllables, or make no reply at all, as if pretending not to hear. One day (we must have been at Dartmoor three or four years I should imagine) he began bullying him with unusual persistency.

‘I say, young bloke!’ he jeered, turning his heavy eyes upon his aide-de-camp, as together we were twisting round the crane; ‘so I prophesied true. Your old woman’s got spliced to a sodger. Do you know that? What a game!’

‘Don’t!’ winced Miffy. ‘Please leave me alone.’

‘Well, but hasn’t she though? Leastways, she’s hanging out in a new shop.’

Miffy’s thin hands trembled as he glanced at his patron timidly. ‘How do you know that?’ he panted.

‘How do I know that?’ echoed Soda, with a giggle. ‘I know lots of things—I’m fly.

The queen of the bloke's young affections hev left her London palace for to pay a wissit to her country place. Where may she hev gone to, shaver ?

Miffy shivered and said nothing, so, my curiosity being aroused, I in my turn inquired :

‘ However did you find that out, Soda ? ’

‘ What’s that to yew ? ’ he retorted sulkily. ‘ I suppose I may take an interest in the bloke’s young ’ooman ? How do I know ? Why—I heerd him talking to the psalm-patter t’other evening. Through those iron cells of ourn you can hear no end of secrets.’

I record this apparently idle discourse because it was a link in the chain of events which not long afterwards brought about an unexpected *dénouement*. The effect of it at the moment was seriously to agitate the post-master, who did not recover himself all day. That his fellow gaol-birds should talk lightly of his wife was the one thing that could stir Miffy’s remains of reason. Soda knew it ; which may have been the motive for his pressing him so constantly upon the point. Was it merely to gratify his propensity for bullying, or had he a more distinct purpose ?

I knew it ; but what was it to me by this time that Miffy should be harassed or not ? The purblind old Scripture-reader knew it, and he, finding hints to be vain, resolved to speak plainly, and if possible, put a spoke into the wheel. Now, it was the practice of that stupid, but well-intentioned man to take the prison hall by hall, and call upon each prisoner separately.

After Mr. Tilgoe's complaint (years back now) as to being deprived of spiritual consolation, the governor had suggested to the chaplain that he might perhaps, with advantage, attend more strictly to his duties ; and the chaplain, resenting the interference, had quarrelled with his chief, whereby, society being limited, the social joys of Dartmoor were not much enhanced. It was outrageous he declared, for anybody to interfere. The pay was absurdly small, and to converse with habitual criminals was waste of time and also debasing. If they sent to him he would see them, not otherwise, for all the governors in creation ; moreover, there were so many that it would not be possible to visit all ; why, therefore, do a thing unevenly ? For by a

recondite sum in arithmetic he had persuaded himself, to the relief of conscience, that he could not in three hundred and sixty-five days have a profitable talk with each one of a thousand captives, and also enjoy the requisite amount of private recreation. 'If we give out,' he argued, 'we must also take in, or else we become a mere empty vessel.' Therefore the original arrangement was simple and satisfactory, and must be adhered to, whereby he elected to sit daily for a certain time in the dignified retirement of his office, to be summoned by a warder if his company was pined for. As it happened, few people pined for that advantage; so he trimmed his fingers in seclusion with a neat pair of scissors, and yawned prodigiously, and wrote erudite Sunday discourses which were over the heads of his congregation; and the real burden of his cure of souls fell upon the pursy little gentleman with the fat and dingy hands, for whom at our first meeting I had evinced so sovereign a contempt. In that matter, as I had discovered long since, I was wrong; for his heart was in his occupation, and he strove hard to do his

Master's work. On the evening which followed the above conversation he turned his attention to our landing; and buzzed about like a stout bee, from cell to cell, whilst the men underwent their weekly hair-cropping.

In his reckoning up of us he, by a simple reasoning, placed Soda and myself on the same pedestal. Soda was a dangerous man—a third lag—who in his sojourn at Chatham had earned for himself the worst of reputations. I, too, was a desperate character, who, as my penal record clearly showed, had flown at my keepers at Pentonville; who, here, had been sulky and unruly; had ventured to argue with my spiritual pastors and masters; and had by no means essayed to put into practice the ‘duty to your neighbour’ of the catechism. Ebenezer Anderson did not love his neighbour as himself—else why had he banged in the head of his neighbour with a pewter-pot? He did not honour or obey the queen—in the person of the ‘screws.’ He did not order himself humbly or reverently to anybody whatsoever. It was clear as ditchwater that he was a

shocking reprobate, matriculating for Party 57—a brand who declined to be snatched from the burning—who refused with contumely to rend either his heart or his garment. Stay! More than once before I became indifferent, I had torn up my clothes, and also my blankets ; but that was during the frantic paroxysms of my soul's agony, and had nothing to do with the text in question. When, with bland unction, I had been exhorted to remember that only by good conduct could I hope for eventual release, I had scoffed in unbecoming fashion, making the unusual declaration that I didn't wish for release, and grinding my teeth when told to take Tilgoe for a model—the lost sheep over whose return to the fold all the angels in paradise were weeping. There was no doubt about it in the mind of the worthy 'psalm-patterer,' that there was no difference, save in degree, between my villany and that of Soda ; therefore the excellent fellow was so nervous when on a visit to either of us, that we were not likely to gain much by his ministrations. It was otherwise with the others in our vicinity. Jaggs was so quaint in his ideas, and so

genteel in his deportment, as fairly to take in the little man. He had a slow way of pushing forward his stool, as though it was as heavy as a chair of state—of giving it a dry rub with his handkerchief—which caused his lecturer unconsciously to reverse situations with him in a way he would never do with me.

As for the Reverend Aurelius (who occupied, it will be remembered, the next cell to him on our landing) he never left that shrine with a dry optic. The case of that peccant clergyman was truly edifying. He was a male Magdalen, shamefully bereft of the picturesqueness which goes with dishevelled hair. The hair of Tilgoe could not become dishevelled—it was as vain to rub it up with the regulation tooth-brush as to rub it down. Yet, deprived as he was of a powerful source of theatrical effect, that ingenious man could play upon the emotions of the Scripture-reader as upon an organ, and discourse eloquent music out of him at his will and pleasure. But Miffy was the stout gentleman's pet captive, so far as the birds upon our bough were concerned. He was genuinely sorry for his deplorable condition—anxious

as much as might be to ameliorate his state. Therefore it was with heartfelt gladness that, this evening, he could bring him news from home in the shape of a fresh letter from his wife. The effect of the unexpected gift was such that a light invaded the groping intellect of the Scripture-reader. These letters touched the fount of tears, and convulsed the form of this poor fellow, who was usually listless and apathetic. By means of letters such as this, then, he might be worked upon for good. His pursy friend would make use of the spell thus discovered; or was the dose of happiness likely to be too strong for one so frail? Miffy, on perceiving the letter, flung himself on his knees, in an over-excited manner, and burst into sobs; and then, when the old gentleman offered to read the note aloud, checked his emotion with an effort begotten of fear, and implored his astonished listener with a tremor of alarm to hush his voice to whispers, lest his neighbour should overhear. Wrung by the dread of that awful neighbour, his muscles quivered like autumn leaves—he cowered and writhed about the floor; and surveying his excite-

ment over his glasses, the worthy man finally settled in his mind that this sort of thing could not go on, that his *protégé* must be removed from baleful surroundings before his brain quite withered—from the neighbourhood, in fact, of Soda and myself.

‘I will speak to the chaplain, who will draw the attention of the governor to your case,’ he observed kindly; ‘or stay, I will put your name down to see the chaplain, and then you can speak for yourself.’

Miffy, crushing his letter in his quivering fingers, looked up with a white face which was swollen and soiled by tears.

‘This can’t go on—now do be calm! Why should you be so singularly moved? You’ve been over long in the quarry—that must be it, and the heavy work has proved too much for your physique. The men you’ve been thrown amongst, too, have done you harm. I do wish that some other arrangement could be invented! I’ll see if you can’t be put into the bakehouse or the kitchen, or something, if only for a time; and you must go down on to another landing—Ebenezer Anderson on one side and Soda

on the other, are enough to drive stronger men than you out of their seven senses !’

Curiously enough, Miffy, when the notion of leaving the quarry was propounded, had heaved a sigh of relief ; but when it was further suggested that he should change his sleeping-place, he had started up with a moan of terror, and crawling on his knees had clasped the fat ankles of the Scripture-reader in mute supplication. That worthy in his surprise nearly fell off the stool upon which his corpulence was balanced, and I too was entirely taken aback—(I was peering through a hole in the iron, drilled by some ingenious predecessor).

‘ No ! Oh no ! Please don’t !’ implored Miffy, with straining eyes. ‘ Please do not interfere—please do not ! I am miserable enough. Do not make my fate worse. Leave me alone ; that is all I beg ! Don’t ask questions—I’m quite comfortable. Pray—oh pray—don’t interfere !’

There was so genuine a ring about his distress that his interlocutor was puzzled.

‘ How difficult these convicts are to comprehend !’ he muttered, scratching his head

and pushing up his glasses as he rose to depart. ‘Well, well! I’ll see what can be done for you in the matter of change of occupation. As to change of berth, I’ll say nothing about it since you are so singularly determined; but it would be for your good to go. What a wayward child it is!’

When he was gone, I observed Miffy hold his close-shorn pate as though it would split, then steal to his ventilator and pass his hand over it with stealth. Then with a start he turned his back on it, and stood erect, for he was summoned suddenly to pass under the steward’s eye, to be fitted with new clothing.

All this amazed me considerably, and the next time I walked with Aurelius I broached the subject to him. But at first he was too much engrossed with manifold arrangements of his own, to give attention to my clack. For some reason or another he was bubbling o’er with human kindness, and in excellent spirits. The governor favoured him more and more—took friends who came to view the prison into his cell to survey the edifying culprit.

‘This fellow,’ the chief was wont to say in his big voice, pointing with a cane at the male Magdalen, as if an interesting member of a menagerie, ‘was a bad un—a regular bad un, sir—and look at him now! You read your Bible, I think, every morning?’

‘Morning and *evening*,’ whispered the engaging specimen.

‘Ah! morning and evening—and attend sacrament, I think? Very proper. You mean to be honest and laborious when you go out, and earn a respectable living?’

‘I do indeed, sir; thanks to you.’

(Down went the lowly head.)

‘Um! that is right, and very satisfactory,’ and, strolling along the gallery, he would point out to his visitor that contamination in prisons was all gammon.

‘Why, sir, that man lives in close companionship with two of the greatest ruffians in the place! Do you suppose they succeed in leading him astray? Not a bit, sir, not a bit! Though I’ve not the smallest doubt that they try hard enough.’

In this much he was right at least—I certainly did not contaminate the Reverend

Tilgoe ; I understood him pretty well by this time, thanks to the candour of our intercourse. I knew that it would be difficult to be more corrupt—that he was without gratitude, without a humanising spark of pity or mercy or sympathy ; and yet I cultivated his society, for the time was gone when instinctively I shrank from vice. He could be very entertaining. His theories were always worth examining — they were so deftly crooked, so plausibly awry. The sublimely lurid light of his master Lucifer was to him a nimbus. There was no end to the glittering facets of his wickedness. Though with me he forbore now to prate of the little slip, I never could learn what his crime had been. It was apparently something so very mean as to linger in the memories of those whose business it was to know it, and who in the multitude of criminals under their care were unlikely to remember such details. What could the offence have been, committed by this clerical gentleman of polished demeanour, which could be remembered where murder and rape and garrotting were forgotten ?

Well, well, I thought, perhaps I may learn some day, perhaps never ; but any way he is an interesting companion, and that is enough for me.

He was jubilant, for the great book got on like wild-fire. His servant, as he chose playfully to dub his gaoler, fully earned his wages. He had quarrelled with Soda lately, because somehow the funds from without had ceased in that quarter. How they ever existed was a marvel to both of us. The temporary supply, however, had apparently ceased for the present, and so the peach-faced one, not having been properly compromised, had turned upon his bungling employer, or would have done so if his more acute master, Tilgoe, had not come to the rescue.

In obedience to that powerful lord's behests, he was still moderately civil to the ruffian.

‘But,’ remarked Tilgoe carelessly, whilst speaking contemptuously of him, ‘he is an insolent varlet, and I soon shall be obliged to throw him overboard. The fact is, that as regards the book I’ve nearly done with him.

The book is complete, to all intents and purposes. I have hardly anything to add. Polishing touches can be done by-and-by. Thanks to the varlet, it has passed by dribblets into the hands of Eloïse. She will get it ready for publication so soon as ever I get out, which will be soon. Eloïse? Yes, Eloïse; she's my *chère amie*. What? Haha! You thought me too respectable to have a *chère amie*?

‘Then do you expect to get out soon?’ I asked, surprised. ‘Your time's not up for several years.’

‘I may, and I may not,’ he returned with mystery. ‘That is my secret. My Eloïse expects me. I am to be her Abelard, and we are to bill and coo in a sweet little cottage home, with clematis and honeysuckle and woodbine, and all that sort of thing; and we shall be as happy as two turtle-doves on the proceeds of the great work. Eloïse is a pretty name, isn't it? But never mind her at this moment,’ he broke off abruptly, and peering up into my face. ‘You were talking about Miffy's strange behaviour—what would you say if I could give you the answer to the rebus?’

‘You!’ I ejaculated.

He decidedly was a remarkable man.

‘Yes—I. But tell me,’ he inquired dreamily, kicking the pebbles before him as he walked with hands clasped behind. ‘We are different, you and I, from the ruck, you know. But as to contamination, there can be no two opinions. Even the governor admits that he feels somewhat contaminated—that his sense of right and wrong is not so lucid as it used to be, and that his quality of mercy is watered. The effect too on myself is quite deplorable. Don’t laugh. Now I wonder how far *you* are contaminated?’

What was he driving at? Something important evidently, for he had donned his most engaging manner, and was trying to read my soul as he stared at me, with head on one side.

I answered by the scornful, jarring laugh which was become habitual to me :

‘The governor,’ I returned dryly, ‘says that you were a bad un—though you are very close, by the-b-y-e, as to what you did—and that now you are an angel of light. Well, with me it’s t’other way. I was as good as

most men once ; now there's not a worse, I'm proud to swear, on this establishment.'

This answer seemed to disconcert Tilgoe, who reflected ere he replied :

'What I mean is, how far are you imbued by the convict's vice ? I don't mean lying—that's common enough outside—but I mean *peaching*. If I were to divulge a secret which concerns somebody on our landing, would you instantly tell the governor or the croker or the psalm-patterer, regardless of the harm you might do, in order to gain some advantage for yourself ?'

'No,' I returned, with a whimsical flicker of virtue. 'Low as I have sunk, I have not come down to that.'

'There spoke my good friend,' gushed Tilgoe, overjoyed ; 'you are to be trusted, I am certain of it. You would never betray anybody ? I was certain of it. Well, then, I will tell you the cause of Miffy's incomprehensible demeanour. He is acting under orders from one he fears—has a responsibility upon his feeble shoulders which bears him down. The fact is——' Here the Reverend Aurelius peered cautiously round, then

murmured : ‘ Haven’t you heard odd noises ?’

‘ No ! Where ?’

‘ On our landing. Then you must sleep precious sound. After all, these iron cells of ours have their advantages. Their reverberation is so excessive, that when a door slams the whole place re-echoes like a discharge of musketry ; and even when we’re quiet there’s a constant humming jar, which would conceal—shall we say a little scratching ?’

‘ Scratching ?’

‘ Yes,’ pursued the parson, ‘ the fact is that Soda has been busy for a long while with all sorts of devices ; that he means to escape ; and that Miffy is his chosen accomplice. The poor creature wouldn’t split if his life depended on it ; and he, if he can, will escape too. It’s a bold experiment ; but what will not men risk in pursuit of liberty ? They will have to descend from a third-story, cross a yard, swarm up a wall, drop nine-and-twenty feet on the other side, and then make across the bog ; not a cheerful look-out. It’s fifteen miles, to Okehampton as the crow flies, without the vestige of a house after

passing the squatters' cottages hard-by; and as soon as the escape-gun is fired the cottagers will be out and scour the country—the wretched paupers—in hopes of gaining the reward. Upon my word, a man must be very sick of life before he'd risk it.'

'But how get down from the third story?' I inquired, my breath quite taken away by the thrilling intelligence. 'They'll break their necks or legs at starting.'

'Soda has seen to that, and I'm happy to say I was able to do him a good turn. With laborious caution, such as only prisoners and elephants are capable of, he has been secret-ing bits of oakum and horsehair this long time past, which he has plaited into a rough rope of the required length, and manufactured into other things. This my servant—you know who I mean—discovered yesterday among his bedding. He would have made his report and blown the gaff at once if my authority had not supervened. He does not dare beard *me*. I told him roundly that he must not muddle the affair, and after a sharp tussle he shut up. It would be too bad if we, their pals, were to decrease the chances,

which are already small. So they'll make the attempt at any rate, and nobody will interfere from our side. I wish them success with all my heart. Miffy's a fool, for his sentence is a short one ; but with Soda it is different, he's in for twenty stretch.'

So this was the cause of Miffy's wild inconsequence ; he was acting against his flickering better judgment in obedience to a will stronger than his own. I saw now why he feared to change his cell. The hole that he was making in his outer wall would instantly have been detected : that would have entailed punishment from the authorities, which would be nothing to the vengeance of his tyrant in the adjoining cell. Poor Miffy ! his case was indeed a hard one. Fervently I joined my prayer to that of Tilgoe, and hoped that the two might get away.

I was glad to perceive that under the stern regimen of that wonderful man whom I called friend, the insolent young jackanapes, our keeper, was to him at all events quite submissive. True, the years that had passed over our heads might perhaps have wrought as great a change in him as in me. Yet no ;

his aspect now was sheepish and crestfallen, the result not of half a decade, but of having grievously overreached himself; of having been caught in a trap and not knowing how to get out again. He hung about the landing, casting wobegone glances at the door of him who held him in his grip, who—wonderful man!—ignored his sighs and took no notice of his grunts, but who, when called out to clean the landing, went down upon his knees in silence, leering up and grimacing at his perspiring and anxious guardian, who, whilst pretending to command, was beseeching him and imploring mercy under his breath.

But Tilgoe was one of those who delighted in giving a serpent if anyone begged him for a fish. The results of his machinations to breed trouble between the public and the authorities were certain of bearing ample fruit, he thought, all in due season. Then would come the feast. This was a sort of ‘snack’ that he was enjoying now. Vainly the unhappy young warder prayed for mercy, for the sake of his sick sister, if not for his own. If he failed to report what he knew, there

would be no end to future trouble. But the Reverend Aurelius would not let him interfere.

‘If you dare speak a syllable,’ he said in a distinct whisper, as he meekly scrubbed his floor, I’ll divulge all our transactions to the governor; aye, and another I wot of with regard to Miffy’s wife,’ he added, with a dark leer, ‘which would obtain for you a becoming sort of dress like mine. Keep your counsel and all will be right. You haven’t got eyes in the back of your head, I suppose, as the governor pretends to have; and convicts are notoriously artful. You’ll get fined maybe, or some such rubbish, for want of vigilance, or more likely receive a reprimand; both of them together though are better than penal servitude.’

At mention of Miffy’s wife the peachen cheek grew sallow. Its owner collapsed, and, wringing his hands, he knew that the clergyman was pitiless. Then he tried his rhetoric on the doll’s-eye polisher himself, pleading that it was very hard that he should get him into trouble, considering that he had not received a ‘mag’ from him this long while.

To this appeal Soda likewise replied something about Miffy's wife, adding with a spark of the bestial cunning which distinguished him :

‘Cheer up, old pal. You’ve had little blunt of late, but you shall soon. She’s changed her address, but we’ll find it somehow ; and Miffy’s too great a loony to get clear off as I shall—he’s bound to be retaken—so *you’ll have him under your hand*, for a longer term too, since he’ll forfeit all his remission. The golden goose who’s fed your dear little sister won’t be killed yet, no fear.’



CHAPTER XII.

THE ESCAPE.

SO we were all in the secret of this attempt, and upon the even drabness of our lives the excitement which it caused, shining like a gleam of sunshine, turned it to orange. Night after night I heard the scratching, and marvelled that the patrol did not; was seized with nightmares of the major 'on the prowl;' seemed to detect his dapper figure in a chintz dressing-gown, peering through cran- nies, gliding along the landings in gum- shoes. Jaggs was in the secret, and became as nervous as myself, which took me aback rather, considering what I knew of his selfish- ness. But we were taken by an epidemic of loyalty. We tossed about and kicked, and

bumped against the partitions in order to cause the iron to reverberate and so smother suggestive sounds ; and Jaggs even took to snoring, which, as a babe, was not one of his accomplishments. This was so unnatural that I felt it could not last. Somebody would certainly peach. Why not Jaggs ? Neither he nor I cared sixpence as to whether Mr. Virgin broke his neck or not. If he did, the world would be the sweeter to those who walked abroad in it. But I was truly distressed for Miffy ; and it struck me as queer that Jaggs, who had starved him without the smallest compunction, and I, the morose, cynical black sheep, who was capable of untold infamies, should be so much interested all of a sudden in his frail and insignificant existence. I suppose that his wistful longing after home was at the bottom of it, and that this one touch of nature unadorned—this solitary floweret in the wilderness—had softened us thus much. At any rate, I was convinced in my own mind that, so long as the generous impulse lasted, Jaggs would no more betray the prospective fugitives than I or Tilgoe would ; and as we lived in a row,

with the two adventurers who were about to risk their lives at the extreme end of our landing, it was possible to keep the secret in few hands.

The warder in charge was tied leg and arm, so there was no danger to be expected from him. It really was quite possible that the affair would turn out a success. It was disconcerting to discover that so much of the human element within me remained unbrutalised. I could gain nought by the success of the plot. Now, in a certain superficial way, which was not worth taking into account, Tilgoe could ; for an escape would produce a rumpus and a wiggling all round from the Home Office, which would be nuts to him. Decidedly I was a failure and a fraud, and would never do justice to my training ; and yet the companionship of fellow-labourers in the quarry was, I was proud to think, not irksome ; the recital of clever burglaries was moving to the blood. I could even hearken to lewd anecdotes with a savage kind of pleasure. The devil was doing his work, though the slowness of his progress was blameworthy on his part. Well, well !

‘Vogue la galère.’ There was no doubt of my soul’s ultimate haven. Society’s edict had gone forth against me long since. At its door, not mine, must lie the responsibility.

As I listened with sharpened hearing for ‘the major on the prowl,’ or sank into feverish dreams through which I heard the scratching (was it never to cease?—how it jarred the nerves!), tales of horror connected with escapes, which had been stored up in some unremembered pigeon-hole since my childhood, poured forth to frighten me. I remembered one specially dreadful case which took place at Port-au-Prince in 1833. It related to two men, both of whom were under sentence of death, and who were incarcerated in adjoining chambers within one building, with this difference, that the cell of Eriaz looked only on the corridor and was pitch dark, while that of Dardeza was lighted by a barred window with a view of the sea beyond. They were given provisions for three days, at the end of which time they were to die; and Eriaz (a mulatto of Herculean force) determined that in the interval he would give Jack Ketch the slip. Which

wall was the outer one he was at a loss to discover, so he took his chance, and grinding away with the manacles that bound his wrists, succeeded at length in creating an impression on the partition. Night and day he worked, regardless of food, or sleep, or the passage of time; and at last, to his joy, the big stone moved, then rolled into twilight, and passing through the opening he found himself—in the next cell! Undaunted by disappointment, he shook up his fellow sufferer, who was groaning on a mattress, and exhorted him to rouse himself for the behoof of both. Surely the two of them could manage it. Dardeza's window-bars were thick and strong, the manacles of each were weighty; yet it was worth while to make a supreme attempt to escape the chilly hand of the executioner. The important question was—how much of the three days had elapsed—how much was still before them? Now Dardeza, having given himself up to despairing contemplation, had been able to reckon up the hours, and, after a moment's thought, announced that the sun which was sinking into the waters was the last which

should ever set for them, for that early on the morrow their last sand would have dripped away. This was bad, but the case was not so hopeless as at first appeared, for he, Dardeza, had a watch-spring concealed about him which he had not had the energy to use. Eriaz clutched it with fierce joy, and between them they soon sawed through a bar and beheld a square open space through which a man's body might pass, with a fall of sixty feet down to the rocks against which the sea lashed and gurgled into foam. Manacled as they were, hand and foot, such a fall meant instant death; but, unshackled, the descent was by no means difficult, for there was a tree a long way down on which an agile man might perch. Time sped swiftly on. They could not both use the spring at once, and it soon became evident that one only of the twain would have time to saw through his irons. Then arose a dreadful discussion. Dardeza held the spring, and was about to go to work upon his own manacles, when Eriaz made a dash to snatch it from him. A hideous fight took place for the talisman between these

two malefactors who were both condemned to death, and who both refused to die ; and the mulatto, bearing the more slender murderer down, demanded the treasure with curses. But Dardeza, if weaker, was not less wicked than his adversary. He made an attempt to fling it out of window. Being foiled in that, he cried : ‘ If I can’t escape, by heaven ! no more shall you ! ’ And with a supreme effort swallowed it. Eriaz sank distracted in one corner of the dungeon, Dardeza tottered into another and fell down choked.

All was not yet lost ! Eriaz was delivered of an idea. Two lives at any rate should not pay the forfeit. Flinging himself with all his weight upon his comrade he strangled him with his fingers, and hammered his head against the floor, and then plunging a hand down his throat, recovered the implement of freedom. In an hour more his irons had fallen off. With the dress of Dardeza torn into shreds and twisted, he made a rope of sufficient length to land him on a tree-branch. When in the morning the gaolers came to conduct the two murderers to the scaffold

they found but one—fearfully mutilated—dead !

This story passed through my mind while the scratching still went on. It had gone on for many nights, and I became so abnormally excited that my skin broke into a profuse cold sweat. This was too awful ! It was too shocking that the half-witted creature should be deliberately immolated on the pyre of George Virgin's liberty ! If it had been anyone else than that vulgar ruffian ! It was but a more modern rendering of the tale of Dardeza and Eriaz. I thought of the consumptive wife and helpless little ones of whom he was always dreaming, and springing out of bed, resolved to interfere. But how ? I could not—no, I could not make up my mind to play the sneak—to write a warning on the slate for Scarraweg to see, or scratch the history upon the bottom of the dinner-tin after the usual convict fashion. Moreover, that would only entail punishment on Miffy. No, there was yet time. I would find an opportunity of speaking seriously to-morrow, and conjure him to consider what he did. Although he no longer worked with

us, there would be little difficulty about that, for, as it happened, I was dinner-orderly, and it would be one of my duties to take the dinner-barrows of our hall out of the charge of the cook's assistants, one of whom the stamp-stealer now was, thanks to the kind offices of his friend the Scripture-reader.

The more I thought it over, the more evident it was that for his wife's sake he must abandon so hazardous and foolhardy an attempt. Why ; a little patience, and his time would be up, and he would rejoin her, a free man on license. What an amazing hold it was that this illiterate, cunning scoundrel exercised over one who was fairly educated. An infatuation—nothing less ! Verily, those who made the law had much to answer for in fusing two such elements together !

Biding my time, with an artfulness of which in old days I should never have deemed myself capable, I got hold of Miffy for a moment, and severely lectured him. But he took no notice ; remaining listlessly silent whilst he picked at the bread which he was

carrying with a sulky frown that must have been like my own.

‘It has to be done, and I can’t help it,’ was all he answered, as though repeating a lesson. ‘There ain’t no use talking, so hold your tongue, please. *He* says it’s to be, so it will be. If we’re seen palavering, we shall both be in a bother.’ Then, with a febrile sparkle in his watery eyes, he added :

‘Thanks, all the same. I do want to kiss the little ones. It’ll be to-night, I think. Ain’t the suspense dreadful? Good-bye—and wish us well. When *he* says a thing’s to be, it must, you know.’

This was despairing. The unhappy dupe was marching to inevitable mishap, and was sustaining his courage by a vain hope of speedily embracing his family. I felt so disturbed by a presentiment of approaching evil that I could scarce swallow my food, and returned to work in the quarry quite out of sorts. There I found that Jaggs took a different view of the matter.

‘Bless your heart,’ he said cheerfully, ‘if the thing’s kept dark, and no one splits, there’s no reason why they shouldn’t get off.

There's a fog rising too, and, so far as I can make out, the secret lies in half-a-dozen hands at most. That young screw's in a rare way. Ha! ha! Isn't he just! The parson's a fly fellow to hold him so well in tow. Personally, it don't matter to me a buttonshank whether they break their legs or whether they don't, except that if they do manage to escape, it'll be a slap in the face for Scarraweg, and make him wild. That's enough for me for the present.'

Then, perceiving that we were watched, he hummed between his teeth the refrain of an old romance :

'Le bon Dieu est tout puissant et l'argent son lieutenant,' and became mightily engrossed in the moving of a block of stone.

Perhaps he was right and I was wrong. I hoped so! His conjecture was just about the fog. It was barely three o'clock of a sultry autumn day when the semaphore signalled those in charge to bring in the outlying parties; and heavy drops of rain began to fall before we reached shelter. 'For to-night' Miffy had said. Well, the

weather was propitious, at all events. Rolling mountains of thunderous cumuli were passing along the horizon, and thin white mist, like water, marked the tumbling waves of the vast moor. If once they were over the outer wall, and screened by that vapour, there were ten chances to one against the fugitives being caught.

Arrived at my landing, I found Tilgoe, whilst pretending to polish the railing, listening with a sarcastic grin to the hapless jack-anapes, who was speaking low and earnestly. Flushed and nervous, almost whimpering, he endeavoured to work upon the clergyman's compassion. It was a forlorn hope.

‘Haven't I always done as you wished?’ he was saying. ‘Why, then, can't you let me be this once? If any of you, now, were to round on me, I'd be a ruined man, and someone'll round—I know he will. As it is, my life's a burthen, with all the things you force me to. I wish I'd never set eyes on you, that I do, for with all your soft ways you've no pity for a man, and would drive him over a cliff with his eyes open!’

‘Don't be an ass!’ was Tilgoe's contemp-

tuous reply. 'It'll be all right if you only keep your own infernal tongue between your foolish teeth, you puling, gabbling baby! Nobody wants to round on anybody; make your mind comfortable as to that. As I've told you twice, and I shan't repeat it again, there's no reason on earth why you should know anything about it at all!'

'Yes there is. I ought to have noticed them loose bricks. Oh dear! oh Lord!' whined the peach-faced one.

'No there isn't,' retorted the other sharply, 'for the place is cleverly concealed with cobwebs rolled in lime. I've seen it.'

'One of the bar-staples is missing in No. 2,' groaned the warder. 'Suppose Mr. Scarraweg were to come round, or the governor. They'd be safe to notice it. I wish I were dead, I do!'

'Please yourself about that,' scoffed the scornful parson. 'No one's going to pry into No. 2, for the best of reasons that there's no one to pry at in the daytime. You know as well as I do that Miffy won't be out of the kitchen until dark, and then, you double-distilled donkey, who's to see if there's a

staple gone or not? You can't loosen bricks by looking at 'em. He's broke the staple, or would have put it back. You're beginning to drivel, and I shall have to get you turned off. They'll break out in the night, I tell you, when you'll be off duty. If anybody's to blame it'll be the night-patrol. Now don't stand grumbling there. I shall get out myself very soon, I have reason to hope, and then you won't be sorry, you ungrateful chap, that you ever set eyes on me. Come, don't jaw; be off!

He was a wonderful man. I must have misjudged him with regard to the labyrinthine byways of his turpitude. He, like the rest of us, could have generous impulses. It was really kind thus to throw the ægis of his powerful protection over the adventurers.

But he was wrong about Miffy. His cell-door was open, and the kind Scripture-reader was standing on the threshold. He was not one, however, to take note of missing staples. Peering through a hole in our partition, I perceived Miffy leaning against the end wall, haggard and wan, a prey to violent agitation.

‘Thank goodness!’ I thought. ‘Common

sense has prevailed. He has spoken, or is about to speak.' But I was mistaken. It was the old man who spoke, whilst Miffy, with tears pouring down his hollow cheek, and his moist lips trembling, was twisting in nervous fingers those dearly-loved bits of crumpled paper.

I could have shaken that fat old man with the silver hair. The years which had whitened his locks had not endowed him with experience. The precious opportunity was flitting by which, once out of reach, might never be caught up. Why, instead of droning platitudes about the virtue of patience, did he not go straight to that tempest-racked brother, and placing a hand upon his shoulder, say: 'You must trust in me. You have something on your mind. I know you have, so don't deny it. Out with it at once!' I have no doubt that if he had spoken thus the half crazy fellow would have confessed. But no; the last chance was nearly out of sight, and I felt in some sort as if I were myself responsible.

Presently, at his wits' end how to calm the mental storm, whose first cause he was too

blundering to fathom, he sat down, and in an exasperating drone read a chapter, while the patient grew with each moment more and more hysterical. Then, finding that the effect of his ministration was not soothing, he sighed and put his Bible and spectacles away with slow deliberation, and crossing his fat hands on his fat stomach, shook his head and departed, muttering as he passed my cell :

‘That fellow must be placed under supervision. I’ll get the doctor to hang a medical ticket over his door to-morrow, with a view to Woking.’

To-morrow ! Much use that would be. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. He was going, and for the life of me I could not stop him. The opportunity was lost. Call it a false sense of honour if you will, but though I heard the rustle of his coat on the woodwork as he passed, I could not stop the postmaster’s only friend. He turned in for a polemical skirmish with Tilgoe, and having shivered a lance or two, trotted away ; and I knew that the course of events was to be shaped by other hands than ours.

Eight o’clock. Lights out. The hall was

wrapped in a dim twilight. All the cells were dark. Peering through my observation-hole, the outside lid of which had been inadvertently left raised, I saw that the fog must be very dense without, for it had even invaded the interior of the great building. A couple of dim figures were gliding like disembodied ghosts along the landings, pausing at this door or that, to see with a bull's-eye what such an one was doing, then passing on, or turning back, as fancy prompted. These were the night patrol in their list slippers. Pray heaven that they would leave our corner unvisited !

One flitted away into extreme distance ; the other loomed large and more large. Was he coming our way ? He was ! Better now than later ; and I jumped quickly into bed, for if he found me up when I ought to have been asleep, I should be haled before the martinet upon the morrow to answer for so grave a delinquency. I closed my eyes and snored, for, velvet-footed though it was, long practice had taught me to detect the cat-like tread. A ray of light flashed upon my face ; then it shot through into the next cell, and

then into the last, and then he descended the iron stair and vanished. All was well !

I listened for the scratching. Jaggs tapped gently on his partition, and signalled :

‘ Do you hear anything ? ’

‘ No,’ I answered.

Nor could I. The gathering cumuli had burst ; the rain was pouring down in such noisy torrents as effectually to mask a little scratching. On tiptoe I stole to the chink. It was pitch dark. I could see nothing. Then I placed my ear to it. Was the attempt postponed ? A pity, if it were indeed to be made, for the weather was most propitious. The guards without would be close wrapped up, with eyes and ears muffled against the blinding storm. Once over the wall, they would be safe. Was Miffy asleep ? No ; I could distinctly make out a knocking. Poor, devoted wretch ! Pray Heaven no harm might come to him !

Hist ! what was that ? Footsteps ? not those of the patrol ? Were they after all betrayed ? With a warning rap against the iron I tumbled into bed, shivering from top to toe, expecting I scarce knew what. Foot-

steps were approaching. Was it the major 'on the prowl?' I heard the voice of Tilgoe say, in crystal accents, intended evidently as a warning :

' Good-night, Mr. Scarraweg.'

Scarraweg! What was he doing here at this hour? Was anything wrong? He very rarely went round the galleries at night. He stopped for an instant, and a few words passed between him and Tilgoe; then he came on. This was awful! But Jaggs was equal to the occasion. He was resolved that the men should escape, and that Scarraweg should in consequence get into disgrace. It was all the better that the chief warder should come round, if only he could be thrown off the scent. Regardless, therefore, of future bread and water, bent only on driving away the foe, he lifted up his voice and began a jeremiad about his aunt.

" Oh, Uncle Scarraweg," he blubbered, in low and dolorous accents, 'you know that aunt ought not to be left at night. She'll burn the bed-clothes and injure her dear skin—I know she will! Do you say you've locked up the bottle? Oh, too confiding uncle!

She has a secret one. You'll find her in bed with her boots on—suffering from an attack of trimins. It lacerates my heart, uncle ! it does, upon my honour, to think what you've to put up with from my poor dear mother's only sister.'

His ruse was successful; at any rate, it seemed so, for, with growls and threats and subdued imprecations, Mr. Scarraweg turned abruptly and went upon his way, and his steps were heard echoing faintly in the distance.

What did he come round for to-night? I conjectured, in doubt. Could he suspect? Why should he? A guilty conscience was making a fool of me. The stealthy knocking recommenced, and I reflected, in a self-examining sort of way, as was my habit, that it was curious that I should be so excited over the escape of these two men. I, who, for my own part, had no desire but to remain quietly where I was. If Scarraweg were to fling wide the gates and tell me I might go, I should beg to be allowed to stay. What had Ebenezer Anderson to do with liberty? He whose very name came into being under

the influence of duress? Why was I so excited? Was it that these two were going back into the world—the world I should never see again; and did this gild them with the aureole of the unattainable? Hardly. It was a last relic of my old self, and I looked at it with the queer kind of idle curiosity with which we gaze at fusty bits of faded ribbon out of a desk. It was pleasant to reflect that however base and hard we may become as regards ourselves, there is always left somewhere upon us one print of our better angel ere she took to flight—one glorious mark of where she kissed us ere she flew away, and whispered as she kissed, that we never are quite lost. It was not Soda or even Miffy who had so roused my interest in the success or failure of the attempt. It was the thought of Miffy's wife, of the pale, fragile thing who counted the days of her husband's punishment, and who possibly, after all, was never to see him more.

Yes. For her sake, though I had never looked on her, I hoped they might get away; and that set me thinking of the precautions they had taken. Miffy's part lay

chiefly in the making of a hole, of loosening the iron square which held his window, and a row of bricks at the side of it, so as to allow of the passage of a man. Soda undertook the rest, and wonderful and mysterious had the labour been with which he had occupied his time for months. His rolled-up mattress masked secrets during the day which, but for Tilgoe's generous interference, would long since have been held up for the admiration of the governor. How curious it was that in his case brutality of an extreme order should walk hand in hand with the most nimble-fingered dexterity. He had coaxed one of the horse-drivers (a red-collar man) to pluck hairs out of his charge's tail. This he made into a net, and wove on it in and out some strands of the oakum from which his rope was fashioned, with such marvellous neatness that at a short distance it looked very like a wig. Out of an old bread-bag he made two caps; out of his sheets a coat and trousers, the Government red mark being obliterated by sewing the cloth above and below together with cotton from his bed-tick. These clothes he was to

put on under his ordinary garments, and, I presume, had made a similar suit for his companion. Once away, all would probably go well, for he would trust to his own impish cunning to change the temporary clothing so soon as a fair chance should offer. Of course he——

Hark ! what was that ? I leapt from my bed to see. Miffy's window-pane was out. The wind rushed through the chink and brought water into my eye. His dim outline leaned through the opening—black against scudding clouds—as, tapping on Soda's pane, he gave the signal. Now I perceived, with admiration, why that worthy had been so anxious to make keys ; and yet my heart stood still, for Miffy's sake, as I saw what a selfish calculator he had been. It was out of Miffy's window they were to escape. Miffy was to run all the risk of discovery whilst the affair was *en train*. If Scarraweg or the governor had missed the broken staple, or had remarked the loosened bricks, it was Miffy alone who would have suffered ; for Soda's wall was intact, there was no reason to suppose him to be a con-

federate. Poor postmaster ! what a companion to follow out into the world !

A cautious scraping ; another ; and Soda, opening both doors ajar, had slid into his neighbour's cell. There was a whispering, and then a scraunch which sent my heart into my mouth, it seemed so preternaturally loud. More scraping, and pitch darkness for a minute, which seemed an hour ; then Miffy stood upright and alone, and was hauling up a slackened rope. The patrol were talking together in the fog at the other end of the hall—how fortunate ! Then came a long pause, during which the postmaster stood irresolute, and my nerves tingled so that I could scarce help calling out ' Be quick ! ' He was passing his hands over his head in an aimless, troubled way. Did his courage fail him at the last moment ? Better, perhaps, that it should do so ; present punishment would be better for him in the end than Soda's tyranny for life. With quivering, uncertain fingers I saw him fix the rope about his waist, and attach the other end securely to a ring where once had hung a hammock. Then he leaned out of the aperture, disap-

peared, feet upwards, and then his head bobbed up, while with one arm he steadied himself by the window-sill. He was preparing to let himself down hand over hand. Holding my breath, while my pulse seemed to stop, I watched—heavens, how eagerly!—the taut movement of that rope. It was roughly made, but strong. If it had bravely borne the strain of Soda's carcase (that first scraunching must have been caused by his bulky body forcing itself through a narrow opening), then it was pretty certain not to snap under the burthen of slender Miffy. All was going well—admirably; another second and he would reach the ground. The rope—oh, what was that?

A loud scream, which sent all my blood rushing the wrong way. A shout, a rush of feet, a din of voices in the yard below. The sharp, short, decisive accents of the governor. The roar of the leonine Scarraweg, his faithful second, as he rapidly repeated his instructions. A shuffling and running hither and thither. A rattle of keys and banging of doors. A struggle. Low moaning from Miffy, as he was being

borne away. More rattling of keys ; then silence. The rope was swinging loosely in the wind.

Presently came a rap from Jaggs.

‘They’re done,’ he telegraphed. ‘That old varmint Scarraweg will make capital out of this, damn him ! instead of getting into a mess. The sly fox must have known of it all along.’

Did he ? I could scarcely believe that—though it was extraordinary that in the storm the hanging figures should have been seen—for his weather-beaten lion face was not good at the concealment of his thoughts. Who could have told him ? Somebody must. Unfortunate Miffy ! What would be his punishment ? Was Soda taken too ? I had not heard his voice in the *mélée*.

Boom ! The escape gun. Then Soda had managed to get off. As usual, the guilty triumphed, the innocent suffered. Yet, was it not well that Miffy should be wrenched from his evil influence, even though, as must now be the case, he had lost all marks and all remission ? But perhaps I was hasty. Perhaps Soda had not escaped. How about that fall

of nine-and-twenty feet? The poverty-stricken cottiers of the district would be out in a trice to scour the plain in hopes of earning a convict's blood-money.

The lonely bogs are honeycombed with quagmires. Even if he escaped the pitfalls on the moor, and evaded his pursuers, was it likely that he would trouble the world for long? He would look like a *pierrot* in those garments made of sheets. Those blue-and-red stockings would betray him; or would he break into some lonely hut, and, by committing a new crime, matriculate for a new lagging?

Search-parties were out all through the night. The governor in person mounted a horse, and placing a revolver in his pocket, galloped off on his own account on a wild-goose chase. His favourite steed—which he valued more highly than many convicts—nearly broke his own leg and his master's neck in a boghole. The major came home again at dawn in a towering passion, having caught nothing except a cold; and ordering me to be brought into the presence, roared out that I had best tell all I knew without

prevaricating, or it would be the worse for me.

I was confronted with Miffy, who shook, and wailed, and wrung his hands ; for not only would he not see his cherished darlings now so soon as he had hoped, but in the surprise of his capture he had dropped his letters—his precious letters—more precious than ever now that the chasm which divided him from his beloved was widened.

The governor was mightily enraged at the audacious attempt of these two villains. It proved, he vowed, that there were not enough spyholes. Warders and convicts were not watched half enough. Scarraweg himself must have been dozing not to have discovered the plot without being told of it. He went about and rubbed up the cudgels, and broken pots, and chisels, and other woeful specimens of the amenities of convict life, and caressed them, murmuring before each :

‘ You brute ! You tried to take my life with a bit of tin, did you ? But you cried *Peccavi* afterwards, thank goodness ! You struck at me with the leg of a table which you were actually manufacturing for my

dining-room, you insolent varlet! and you repented it, too; I should think so. These nimble-witted rascals never leave one any peace. I vow that a governor ought to have six thousand pounds a year instead of paltry hundreds. Charon, when he has deposited his load upon the other side of Styx, washes his hands of the scamps. Not so with us. When the rascals are locked up, then our troubles begin. I'd like to know what they'd say of me at Whitehall, if two of my men escaped. They wouldn't say a word if my head were dinged in; but that's just like the ingratitude of the great. What with the people who want to get me out of the way, and the others who want to get out of the way themselves, my life's a pleasant one.'

Being brought up to a proper pitch by an affectionate scrutiny of the museum, he glowered at me, and thumping his desk with a book, shouted out:

'Now, you sirrah! Remember who you are, and where you are, and what you are, and what you are likely to remain; and just tell us all about it.'

I held my peace. Much I cared about his threats !

‘You won’t do yourself any good, you know, by holding your tongue,’ he went on. ‘You’ve held your tongue too much altogether. I don’t mean as to speaking to fellow-prisoners, of course,’ he corrected himself; ‘but as to your morose and objectionable conduct. Oh, you surly scoundrel !’ The governor, being thoroughly out of temper, was floundering. ‘I mean that there are times when it’s your duty to speak out. It’s an extraordinary thing, but when you men are forbidden to talk, you’re always at t ; and when you’re invited to speak, you’re as dumb as the sphinx !’

‘I have nothing to say, sir,’ I responded quietly. ‘I am a felon, and any information I can give must in natural sequence be worthless. What’s a prisoner’s word against a warder’s ? He’s put on his honour ; I am not. I tell you plainly that if I did speak I should certainly tell you lies.’

Scarraweg glanced at me from under his penthouse brows, and it seemed as if he approved of my independent bearing ; though,

from mere force of habit, he clicked impassibly :

‘ Left turn—quick march !’

‘ Bring up Tilgoe !’ roared the governor. ‘ His frame of mind is better. He’s told us a good deal already, but possibly can tell more. Unfortunately, he’s taken up with this incorrigible scoundrel, Anderson, on Sundays, and may be growing contaminated. I do wish they’d give us a careful classification of prisoners. The sheep and the goats are most bewilderingly mixed !’

I was marched back to my cell, and on the way came face to face with the Rev. Aurelius, who had been sent for because I was recalcitrant. Good heavens ! What could the governor mean ? ‘ *Told us a good deal already !*’ Was it really possible that, whilst pretending to befriend them, this miscreant—worse even than I supposed—had been making capital all the while out of the would-be fugitives ? Was it possible that he could be so base as that ? I remembered as, open-eyed and open-mouthed, I sat on my bed-place considering the matter, that he had distinctly pumped me with reference to the

line which I myself should be likely to adopt. Was this done to be sure that none but himself would reap the benefit of turning evidence? Of course it was. For the same reason he forbade the young warder to speak, and encouraged Soda and Miffy in their undertaking. He had evidently laid the train—taken care that no difficulties were likely to check the explosion—and then, on the sly, had warned the authorities of what was taking place. And what had he done it for? Was it merely a *can-can* of fiendishness that he was dancing? No. Calculating men of his kidney do nothing without a reason. He wanted his liberty—had thrown out hints, indeed, that he might soon be free—and why? To superintend the production of the great work—the apple of discord—which, as regards the officials of the prison, was to set everybody by the ears. Consummate hypocrite and schemer! He had egged on three wretches to commit themselves (of course he had denounced the young warder too), in order that, by making a merit of betraying them, he might obtain greater facilities for striving to betray in turn those

before whom he professed to be so meek. If, by the disclosures he had just made, he could obtain a shortening of his sentence, why so much the sooner would his vengeance fall, in the shape of his grand book, upon those who had dared to keep him caged ! What were the ruffianism of Soda, the cold-blooded selfishness of Jaggs, to the sublime and elaborately built-up villainy of a devil such as this ? And so clever was he, he had so life-like and deft a way of weaving lies with truth, that I felt half convinced now that his statements would be believed. I was sorry, though, as I sat all day in my cell and thought over it, that I had given him any assistance in his book. It was humiliating to be mixed up with so despicable a black-guard. I did it in idle mischief, as a safety-valve for my own bitterness. I was sorry that I had ever had anything to do with him at all—his conduct was really too low ! And then I wondered, for the thousandth time, what the crime of the gentleman had been who was seduced into being guilty of a little slip ?

Miffy was shut up in the punishment-cells. We were all agog as to what had become of

Soda. The Scripture-reader came and sat opposite me in my domain, and exhorted me with renewed energy to reform my ways. 'My ally and co-ruffian, Soda,' he said, 'was certainly dead by this time—drowned in a quaggy tarn—gone to his proper place. Why would I not take this awful example to heart, reform my ways, and become a penitent like Tilgoe? Why had I declined to assist the governor, by being so obstinate and so impertinent?'

What answer could I give to this good man who worried me? I was saved the trouble of begging him to go his ways by a noise downstairs. The slightest sound now drove us half wild with curiosity. Was it Soda brought back in triumph, or was it his corpse?

The pousy little Scripture-reader bustled out to see.



CHAPTER XIII.

SODA.



HE burly ruffian had calculated cunningly when he planned to make of Miffy his confederate. He had forced him to undertake the dangerous and arduous work of breaking through the wall, had held over him an avalanche of threats of the dreadful things which would happen if he dared to disobey, or to forget, or otherwise to lose his head. Then, the cat's-paw's part accomplished, and himself safely deposited upon the ground within the yard, he left the postmaster in mid-air at the first alarm, without a ripple of distress, as a bait—like cheese suspended in a mouse-trap—and, taking advantage of the mist and the confusion, swarmed on to a postern-gate, then climbed

up a wall by means of a water-pipe, then dropped (hoping that his loosely-knit limbs would save his bones), from a height of nine and twenty feet into a wet ditch; and after lying in a huddled heap, half stunned, for a moment, staggered up and dashed straight before him, over dell and plain and hollow, trusting to luck for a direction. By the time the gun was fired, he had got beyond the cordon of cottages, and, considering the wet blanket wherein nature was enveloped, seemed to have a fair chance of avoiding capture.

After an hour's run, during which he stumbled over boulders, in the dense obscurity, many times, and bruised himself no little, he stopped for breath, and mopping the perspiration from his face, paused to consider. Not a sound! not even the cry of a wild-bird. Mr. Virgin, at the best of times, was never fond of solitude, and the immensity and gloomy stillness of this hard-earned freedom frightened him. It struck him for the first time to be sorry, as he paused to collect his hazy thoughts, that Miffy should not have been as successful as himself. His company for a time at least would have been

a comfort. It would have revived his oozing courage and kept up his spirits, to have pinched and kicked him. He might, too, have been despatched as a scout, a few yards in advance, to give warning of approaching danger, or, in the event of hot pursuit, have been employed to produce a diversion. This silence was intolerable—unearthly! What a pity that the fugitive did not dare to sing! At first, egged on by shouts, he had run forward, not caring where he went. Now he was alone in the sea of vapour, and, as he toiled on more slowly, revolved in his mind as to what was the next thing to be done. The night air was fresh and sharp, although it was mid-autumn, and Soda's thoughts began to dwell unpleasantly on the bread and cocoa which no orderly would bring him on the morrow. The first thing to be seen to was the arrangement of his costume. That did not take long. The mustard jacket and fustian knickerbockers were off in an instant, and buried in a hole with fierce delight. The ungainly trousers were pulled down over the tell-tale stockings, the wig and cap placed on the bullet-head, and the complacent scoundrel

turned round and round to look at himself in order to see if there was anything that he could improve.

No. Homely and awkward as the suit was, it would answer as a makeshift till something better could be obtained. The wet ditch that had received him an hour ago was thick with mud and slime. That was well, for these white garments must be thoroughly stained somehow, then dried, before their wearer could venture into a village. In which direction was he going, he wondered, as, satisfied with a last survey, he started on again; and how far was he from a village? There was no road visible. It would not do to follow roads. Here was a path; did it lead to Tavistock, or Horrabridge, or Plymouth, or Okehampton? It signified little which; one was as good as another for his purpose; though, if he had been asked to choose, he certainly would have selected Plymouth. The path led nowhere. It stopped abruptly at a pool, into which the fugitive was in danger of falling headlong in the darkness. Starting off at haphazard, he groped away into the mist again.

He wandered on till the day broke, stumbling, tripping, falling down, and anathematising his fate with ingenious curses, in that he should ever have been removed so far from the gay metropolis. What a stretch there lay between this horrible, endless desert, and the joys of the Seven Dials! The accursed fog was stifling, but it was a friendly fog. By-and-by, no doubt, it would lift a little—not too much, for mists lie heavy and long upon the moor—and then the wayfarer would be able to gauge his surroundings and organise some plan for future guidance. Meanwhile he must crawl, with exceeding caution, through the gloom, keeping a sharp look-out, lending an attentive ear lest—though this was unlikely now—some oaf more persevering than the rest should outstrip his fellows, and track the convict down.

He trudged miles and miles, uncertain whether he walked straight or was moving in a circle. Onward he struggled, he who loved so dearly to do nothing, till his knees felt weak, and there was a pain at the top of his spine to which he was a stranger, since it arose from genuine fatigue. Tired, hungry, solitary—*free!* There was enough in

that tiny monosyllable to make up for all the rest. Alone on the vast moor, well beyond the reach by this time of cottiers as well as of searching-parties. Stay! what was that which, on a flatter piece of ground than he had yet passed over, was watching him? An animal was it, or a human being? A man, curse him! but with his back turned, which was a consolation. He was not watching; had naught in common with prison searching-parties; yet might he, if evilly disposed, give an alarm. Had he seen the wanderer or not? Were others within hail? Was he armed or defenceless? His clothes—the clothes of the work-a-day world—would be worth a little risk; and besides, he might have money in his pocket. This was no time for mincing matters—the man was off his guard—and Soda (for cowards, like rats, can be goaded into bravery) looked round for a weapon of offence. A jagged stone—the very thing! Dropping on his knees, then on his belly, the ruffian crawled towards his prospective victim like some great white reptile; then rising, made a rush, and pounding down his weapon with all his

might, overthrew the stranger, and fell with him, prone. No cry, no struggle. Somewhat surprised at so facile a victory, Soda peered forward and discovered that his antagonist was a scarecrow—a worn and ragged suit spread wide upon two crossed sticks. A laughable incident this, though the convict was little inclined for merriment; and yet a lucky one. If dead men will tell no tales, still less will a ravished scarecrow. To don the ragged disguise over his white one was the work but of a few minutes; the battered hat was worth a thousand of the bread-bag cap. This was indeed a stroke of fortune. No danger now in creeping into the nearest ale-house. Where was there one? No matter. Buoyed with new hope, the fugitive wandered on again. He wandered all day, striving to pierce the fog, in vain. Not a vestige of man or beast—not a sound. He slept, and woke refreshed, but hungry. Morning came again, grey and cheerless, and the mist showed no signs of clearing. Soda groped on and on, like the children of Israel doing penance in the desert, ignorant of whither he was going, faint from lack of food, exhausted with

fatigue, trembling with fear in that awful silence. Oh for a tin of that comforting hot porridge—for a portion of that bread of which he daintily had been accustomed to complain! This was worse, far worse, than anything he had ever suffered. Was he to die of starvation like a dog, and have his bones picked piecemeal by the crows? With a sentimental feeling due to terror and an empty stomach, Soda sat upon the ground and wept at his own unhappy fate; for was it not a melancholy prospect for a man in the best of health—who had always lived well and copiously at the expense of others—to be destined for so pitiful an exit? There was not a pocket with sixpence in it for miles and miles—not a woman with a watch or so much as a pocket-handkerchief—not a pawnshop or a gin-shop within a day's journey at least. With futile and abortive rage he wished himself back again at Princetown, and heaped curses upon curses on Miffy's head for having left him, as he considered, in the lurch.

All through this day he tottered on, stretching sometimes both palms in front to sweep the opaque veil aside, which choked

his throat and caused his eyes to smart, sinking down now and again in abject despondency, to rise up in an instant or so with veins swelling like whipcord, as, blaspheming, he shook his fists at heaven. Then he grew light-headed, and the white mist seemed rainbow-hued, and crawling about in search of berries, he essayed to mitigate internal pangs and gnawing by filling his mouth with grass.

As he grew weaker he became a prey to horrid visions. Surely that was Blackbeetle Bet, standing with face buried in her hands and weeping as if her heart would break, as he saw her when first he became a felon. Why did she not bring him food as in days gone by she used to do? Then she looked up into his face and was gaunt and green, with black circles round her blazing eyes, as he had pictured her when news was brought to Chatham that she was dead through him. In those days he had suffered much from nightmare; she had stood over him without mercy, and he had writhed under her grasp in vain. Now she was more gruesome, more tall, more thin, more gauntly haggard; an

awful shade, as her darkling form hid out the misty curtain and towered far up into the vault.

He shrieked in unreasoning terror, and, unheeding of bruises, fled on—and on—and ever on—for a period that seemed like weeks, with intervals of coma which were not sleep, till, catching his foot in something, he tottered and fell face forward against a wall. Yes! a *wall!* By some fortunate hazard he was out of the desert, within hail of the abodes of men, and when he beheld the wall, with its trim coping-stone, the sight of it gave fresh courage and fresh strength.

The mist was gone now. It had served his turn, masking him from his pursuers, and it was well that it should disappear in order that he might ascertain to what manner of place he had arrived. It was a high wall, like that of a park. He was too weak to try and scale it, so, supporting himself against its rugged surface, he dragged his unwilling limbs along a ditch that was bedded with moss and brambles. Suddenly he was confronted by a man—a real man this time—whose aspect set his jarred nerves in a

tremor, as he perceived that the uniform was blue. It was a member of the rural police, who, catching a glimpse of a cowering figure half concealed by brambles, made a dash at the ragged coat-collar, and dragged its owner into the light.

‘Oh! I’ve got you, have I, at last?’ cried the constable. ‘I’ve been after you this long while, day and night, you miscreant! All the police of Okehampton have been bothering after you. Where’s your gun? So you bag other folks pheasants, do you? But never no more, my friend. Come, don’t be lazy, that won’t serve your turn, you hound! Step out, and don’t you try to escape. The gamekeeper and his men have only just gone home. You’re going along of me to the station.’

Here was a mistake. Soda—bewildered, jaded, stupefied—could see that at once. He was taken for some poacher. Well, that was better than that it should be suspected what he really was; and yet it would not do to be marched off to a police-station just at present. Rewards would of course be out for the escaped convict, and bills posted.

How long had he been wandering? Was it one day and night, or seven? Hunger and exhaustion caused his murky brain to work even more slowly than usual.

‘I’m not a poacher,’ he stammered, scarce able to articulate. ‘I’m so hungry and so tired that——’

‘Hallo!’ responded the constable, who, perceiving by the worn and haggard look, the unshorn chin and wobegone sodden visage, and muddy suit of rags, that this was not his man, cried out: ‘Who are you, and what are you doing here? Stand up, and let’s have a look at you. Take off your hat. Take it off, I say!’

Soda, to whom with renewed hope and the vicinity of man had come a desperate clinging to existence, moved back a step, and the constable, nettled, gave his hat a tilt with a thick stick he carried, and his amazement was considerable when he beheld a head of hair fall with the hat at his feet, exposing to the observation of himself and a rising sun, the shaven crown which told its tale too well.

‘Wheugh!’ he whistled. ‘That’s it, is it?’

You've come across the moor from Princetown. There's a description of you up at our place. Very sorry, my lad, that you should have had such a trudge for nothing; but make your mind easy—you shall make the return journey in a carriage.'

Though Soda's instinct was blurred and numb, it told him that the game was well-nigh lost. What a pity! and yet, an inner voice whispered that if only he was given food there might be another chance. He had reached Okehampton somehow. Oh for a little food, and a little time, and some means of getting the best of this simple-minded rustic! It was too hard to have got so nearly out of the vortex after scheming so many months, only to be caught upon its rim!

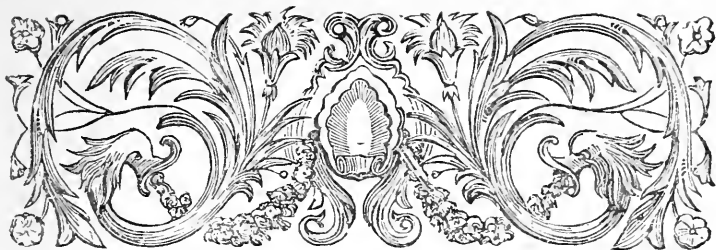
For the moment there was nothing for it but to submit. The ruffian's head throbbed; he was dizzy and could hardly stand. The rural constable, chattering on the while, produced a pair of darbies, which he kept handy for the behoof of the invisible poacher, and placing them on the wrists of his new prize, bade him walk in front and step out. But it was quite clear that the man spoke truth.

He was exhausted, very ill, faint from inanition. His knees threatened to give way at every step. It was some distance to the station round the park-boundary, so he gave him his thick stick to lean upon, and supported his bulky frame on the other side with his own arm. Soda's cunning was awakened by a sense of extreme danger, and he seemed to see daylight as he limped along. A narrow path wound under the park-wall with no one by to see. The stick—the chattering policeman who was full of his grand prize! The ruffian's cunning was wide awake, and, coming to his relief, strung up his nerves. It was a rash effort for one so weak; but liberty would be the guerdon of success; and he had been so near to liberty. His position could not be worse than it now appeared. As a few hours since he had longed for Princetown, so now the thought of returning thither filled him with a fury which was a sort of strength. Sinking down on a stone, he cried with moans that he would go no farther, for, crippled by handcuffs, he could not lean upon his stick. He would go quietly; indeed, in his deplorable

state he could not do otherwise. What was there to fear in one so utterly famished and undone? It was unheard-of cruelty. Well, then, a man can't do more than he is able, that's quite certain. The wanderer would undertake to go quietly if the handcuffs were removed, for he was dying from lack of food; but with handcuffs he would not budge an inch. What was the rural constable to do? He could not carry this mass of flesh; neither could he leave him. From Princetown to Okehampton by a circuitous route! He must indeed be hungry. His protest was not unreasonable. There was nothing for it but to free his hands. So he took the handcuffs off, and the convict, full of gratitude, rose up, and they were enabled to proceed more briskly. Despite the new-born resolution bred of despair, Soda swayed to and fro like a drunken man. If the thing had to be done, it must be now or never, for the fictitious force was fading rapidly. Could it be done? Was aught so apparently impossible worth the trial? The garrulous policeman was unsuspecting, and chatted merrily. Pointing straight ahead as though he saw

some one, his prize called out: 'There! a man in corduroys!' to which the constable replied: 'Where? the man I'm after!' He said no more, for with a wild back-stroke of the sturdy stick, his companion felled him to the earth; and reeling round himself, faint with the prodigious effort, fell prostrate on his body in a swoon.

Two peasants passing a few moments later found the two thus lying. The constable, who was insensible and bleeding freely, was conveyed on a stretcher to his home; the convict, before many hours had passed, was crouching, heavily ironed, and clad in his old garb of yellow, in the penal quarter of Dartmoor Prison.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE REVEREND AURELIUS HOPES.



HERE was a grand investigation into the affair, which came as a godsend to the Dartmoor officials, who, not having the resource of hard labour, were growing into zoophytes through dullness. There were constant discussions going on in the governor's room, the door of which was for ever on the move. Warders stood whispering outside in knots, stealing in on tiptoe when summoned, as if it were Bluebeard's chamber. A director came down from London—the governor's own carriage was sent to Tavistock to fetch him—he looked solemnly through his glasses and made voluminous notes ; then devoured vast quantities of beef and pickles, and congratulated

the major on his pickles, and drove away again. The parson's wife and the doctor's lady stared at him over their blinds, and waved pocket-handkerchiefs as if he had been the Queen ; and made up a tiff of long-standing in order that they might take tea together and discuss the important event.

As to us convicts, we crept about with bated breath, as though death were in the house, for we knew that as far as we were concerned the result of the investigation would be a tightening of the reins, and the making of more spy-holes ; that discipline would become even sharper than heretofore ; and not a few of our number were rendered peevish by the reflection, that if they had only known and 'peached,' they might perchance have bettered their own position.

The only individual who was radiant was the Reverend Tilgoe. He had the honour of being closeted with the director, who complimented him afterwards publicly upon his evidence. He had replied with becoming meekness that he was only a lowly prisoner, who sincerely repented of his sins ; that he regretted being a burthen to his country, and

always endeavoured to avoid giving trouble to those who were set over him ; that he seized this opportunity of thanking them, one and all, for their unvarying kindness and consideration ; and was, finally, so moved by excess of gratitude as to be unable to restrain his tears.

The little governor was gratified and affected, and blew his nose loudly while receiving the compliments of the director. Yes, he was glad to say that, as he interpreted it, the system worked admirably. The prisoner now before them was a proof of that. Nothing could have been more dastardly than the offence for which he was undergoing servitude, yet look at him now ! The chaplain and the Scripture-reader would give him the best of characters. He was a blue-collar man, who would join the privileged class as as possible. He never gave the least trouble ; was punctual and industrious ; was a constant attendant at the holy table ; had even been known to employ his Sunday exercise in trying to save, by timely exhortation, one of the very blackest sheep—a man called Ebenezer Anderson. He would go forth into the

world again, when the time came, a regenerated sinner, an honour to himself and to his country ; above all, an honour to the system which showed that none need be depraved by evil communications. For the present he might return to his work with the knowledge that his guardians were pleased with him.

He tripped, smirking, up to our landing, with a comical look of triumph, which turned into one of disdain as he beheld, waiting there, his rueful slave.

The peach-faced one, worn out by poignant anxieties, had little of the peach-bloom of youth about him now. All things considered, he had come well out of the ordeal ; but he was full of foreboding as to the future, as, too nervous to remain long in one position, he kicked his heels and whistled, now resting an elbow on the railing, now leaning his back against the wall, and then starting from it as if all he touched were hot. He had been fined and reprimanded for carelessness, that was all ; but what was to happen next ?

Tilgoe became every day more exigent, dragged him every day a step lower with ruthless grasp, forged every day a new rivet

of compromise, wherewith to strengthen his chains. He was forced to bring in dainties; to fetch and carry; to provide tobacco for his master, who never had smoked, but which he chose to distribute as largesse to fellow-prisoners. By dint of being always well supplied with 'prison currency,' Tilgoe made himself popular among his mates. They did his dirty work for him; obliged him in a host of ways. As the young warder became more helpless, so did his lord's demands increase. His life was not his own, he said, groaning to himself whilst reviewing his distressing position. But Tilgoe eyed him as he passed with greater scorn even than usual. From motives of prudence he had not betrayed him when he betrayed the others; but now he felt, as he looked at him, that it was nearly time to kick down the ladder. For services rendered and exemplary conduct, his sentence would certainly be commuted, and then this varlet might go to the devil. He would be free in a month or two at most. Meanwhile his servant must during the brief remaining space be useful. So, calling him into his cell,

he gave him a paper packet, with orders that it should be posted forthwith.

‘You know I can’t do it,’ pleaded the unhappy warder. ‘You know that, thanks to you, I’m in disgrace myself, and that I can’t ask leave just now. The thing can’t be posted here, where nobody’s got anything to do but to see what his neighbour does. Have you no conscience?’

‘Don’t presume to argue!’ Tilgoe retorted with impatience. ‘Of course your fines and rubbish will be paid by Eloïse, so don’t worry about that. You’ve got to do what you’re told, and pretty smart too, or I’ll know the reason why. You can send your sister in to post it.’

‘What, all the way to Tavistock?’ exclaimed the other in desperation; ‘and she so ailing that it makes a man’s heart bleed to look at her! There, you’ll drive me to do something which we shall both regret. I’m sick of it. The suspense I’m always in is like the rack. I wish I’d made a clean breast of it long ago. If it wasn’t for her sake I’d throw it up this minute, and go and

confess to the governor—for anything would be better than what you make me bear !

His victim was at bay, and the Reverend Aurelius surveyed him with amusement.

‘ Well, well,’ he sneered ; ‘ what a fuss to be sure ! Don’t waste your breath, there’s a good boy ! Keep the packet carefully—don’t put it in your pocket, man !—and post it as soon as may be.’

Tilgoe was quite pleased with himself, and everybody was pleased with him—except one, Mr. Scarraweg, who, standing bolt upright in a corner, armed with a bunch of keys and a pencil, in the presence of the great man from town, had watched the gambols of the male Magdalen with an expression of unutterable disgust. He had accepted the convict’s information, and had acted on it, as in duty bound, but did not respect, for all that, the channel through which it came. That the great man from town should, led by the governor, be taken in by the despicable hypocrite, was a matter for wrathful reverie ; and, despite the awe-inspiring presence, the old sea-dog grew so angry that he could scarcely keep up the deportment which should go with

the wearing of state uniforms. A tantrum was coming on—a very bad attack—and if it were to explode like a bombshell and spread dismay and disaster even in the awful presence, who would presume to prophesy how dire the result might be? It was all very well in theory to leave your private feelings on a door-mat, but things will happen sometimes which may not be endured even by the best-trained; and so the chief warder, mistrusting his equanimity, pretended that his nose bled, and left the presence along with the male Magdalen, when that penitent was told that he might go.

He walked up and down the hall and growled, as the caged lion does, till after a time he felt better, and was about to return to his duty, when he seemed to become conscious of high words on the third landing. Talking going on—actually talking—and the director on the premises. Were marvels never to cease? It was Tilgoe's voice too; whose soft and unctuous tones were so sickening to the chief warder. What was up? In his irascible state Mr. Scarraweg was burning for action: for something that would require tact

and promptitude. Who was Tilgoe squabbling with? The warder in charge came down the stairs, and, scowling, sped by with a swift footstep. Something was wrong. The 'sea-dog,' who was good at putting two and two together, had long been aware that this young warder and the penitent were on over-friendly terms. Were they now beginning to disagree? It was a fine opportunity for trying a *coup d'état*.

'Here, you come along with me,' said the chief, calmly. 'I just want a word with you in private.'

The young man started, but answered nothing, and followed his superior abstractedly, into his sanctum. Arrived there, Mr. Scarraweg, with quiet deliberation, while the other watched him curiously, pulled down the blind, drew the curtains, lit a candle, and, locking the door, placed the key with a slap in his trouser-pocket.

'Now, messmate,' he said, 'you've got off precious easy over this job, and you knew more about it than was quite convenient to admit. Yes, you did; but I don't want to say any more about that. You've skimmed

by the rock ; it's got over and passed ; but I can see a lighthouse through a fog as well as most folks. I want you to learn a lesson which will last you for life. That's about what I want *you* to do. Don't go aground. What were you and Tilgoe doing just now ?

The young warder coloured to the roots of his hair, and looked up quickly, then answered :

‘Nothing, drat him, though he's more bother than enough.’

‘Oh ! nothing, eh ?’ retorted the chief, who by this time had recovered himself and was inclined to be jocular. ‘You're a nice young man—a very nice young man—one whom to look at's to admire. What do you suppose I called you in here for ? To take a cup of tea ? or say a bit of tripe friendly-like ? or some liver and bacon with a glass of bitter ? You don't expect so, eh ? Clever young man, you are not wrong. I've called you in here, and I've been considerate enough to draw down the blind because—well, because I'm a going to search you.’

The young man bit his lip and turned deadly pale as he whispered :

‘By what right?’

‘By the right that I’ve got you here under lock and key, and mean to keep you here until I’m satisfied. That’s good enough for me. Come, strip!’

The young man hesitated for a moment, then, looking straight at his chief, with saucy lines playing about his mouth, he placed his two palms on the table and vaulted on to it.

‘I warn you that you play a perilous game,’ he said. ‘Warders protest against being searched, and I trust always will, for it’s an indignity which lowers their self-respect. Why, you’d degrade them to the level of a convict! *You*, who are a warder yourself! A respectable man, if he were liable to be searched, would decline the office of warder altogether. The Lord knows it’s hard enough, and ill-paid enough, without that added to it.’

‘A respectable man,’ retorted the sarcastic Scarraweg, ‘wouldn’t mind being searched if it strengthened the hands of the authorities, because he’d know that nothing contraband could be found on him.’

‘Oh! I’ve no objection to being searched

except on principle!’ declared the other. ‘You’re a rum old bit of sea-timber, and I’m glad to humour you. You’re venerable enough to be my dad, you know, and I’ve a proper feeling about respecting the whims of grey hairs.’

Leaping blithely from the table, he flung off with aggressive haste his tunic and waistcoat, divested himself of the rest of his clothing, shaking out each scrap and wringing it like a sponge with pompous grimaces, until, stripped of all but jersey and shoes and stockings, he struck an attitude with a peal of laughter and posed as some monumental effigy.

The joke, however, was lost on Scarraweg, who, his shaggy brows knit and Newgate frill erect, was watching with eyes like a ferret’s.

‘Poses plastiques! what do you think of my figure?’ laughed the peach-skinned one.

‘So much, that I’d like to see a trifle more of it,’ gruffly retorted his chief.

‘Oh! come, come!’ returned the other growing serious. ‘A joke’s a joke—but it becomes a nuisance when pushed too far.

I've humoured you for a frolic, old gent, but I ain't all pie! Here are my things. Feel them yourself, but be quick about it, for it's chilly.'

'You're a good chap, messmate,' answered Scarraweg, with affable and suspicious promptitude. 'If you honour father and mother and the greyheaded, your days will be long in the land, you know! but if you don't, and cry, "Go up, baldhead!" your days will be short enough, for you'll be gobbled up by bears.'

'I don't understand your scriptural allusions,' his junior remarked lightly, whilst slipping on his shirt.

'Don't you? If so deuced respectful, why not be obedient to your elders? What I mean is that while you think you're scudding under storm-sails towards port, you're drifting on the reefs. That there image, as you're so good at imitatin', didn't wear shoes and stockings, did he?'

The young warder turned a shade more pale, and pretended not to hear. Then Scarraweg, producing his key, strode to the door and stuck it in its place.

'You've sprung a leak, shipmet,' he

grunted. 'Unless you take off shoes and stockings before I count ten,' he roared, 'I'll call in a dozen of your mates to see you standing thus !'

In Mr. Scarraweg, zeal took the place of genius. He had accomplished his *coup d'état*. Trembling now, the wretched paid-servant of a convict took off one boot and then one stocking, and then, more slowly—with deprecating murmurs—another boot. Chroniclers have singular stories to tell sometimes. That second boot was stubborn, and declined to come off. At last it did ; and in it the packet stood revealed which Tilgoe had given him just now. Scarraweg snorted as the proud dolphin may have snorted that bore Arion on its back, and pocketed the packet ; then turned his sharp eyes upon the junior with mingled pity and contempt.

The latter, no longer saucy, broke into sobs and wrung his hands.

'Oh, sir !' he pleaded, 'if you knew what I've gone through ! My existence has been a long-drawn curse since that—that *devil* got me in his power. I wanted to be kind, and

he seemed so good, and then we were so hard up at home ! The sister was woful ill, and wanted jelly and things—and all my pay was swallowed up in paying fines for being late, after sitting up with her all night. I'll tell you all—I will, upon my word—and it'll be a relief. There, I'm glad you've found me out. Well, then ' (what a pitiable aspect he must have presented—sobbing and gurgling—standing in his shirt !), ' I was that hard up that I got a few trifles for L R Y 233 and Y 240—Soda and Jaggs, you know—and this parson finding it out, got me to pass papers—ever so many papers—and to bring him in foolscap and lead pencils. I didn't know—no more than the dead—what it was all about. A book, I think he said, that he was writing ; and he's awful sharp, sure enough ! Well, one thing led to another, as things will, and I was so wretched that I take my Bible oath I'm glad you've caught me. I am—honour ! But you don't want to ruin me, do you ? You're a kind-hearted old sort—I know you are. For my poor sister's sake, who's in a decline, you wouldn't. It'd be the end of her.'

In his anxiety the young culprit laid a beseeching hand upon the arm of his superior, which the latter did not shake off.

‘It’s the old story,’ Scarraweg said at last. ‘You impudent young shavers, as ignorant as sucking-pigs—only just born, as I may say—think yourselves fit to cope with the spawn of the London dens—with the acute blackguards whose noses the devil himself has sharpened with his best file, and naturally enough you come to grief. Now I ought to take this packet instantly to the governor, and tell him the whole business. I ought—but come, all hands to the pumps ! For your sister’s sake—God forgive me !—I won’t do it. She’s a poor frail body, and, as you say, it’d be the end of her. I’ll keep your secret on this condition. You’ll go this instant to the governor, and say the winds are too strong for your sister’s health, and ask to be transferred. The only thing for your complaint is change of air. I’ll back you up, and so you’ll have another chance. Come, put on your things, and go to him at once.’

The convict’s luckless drudge kissed, in

his gratitude, the gnarled hand of Scarraweg, and presented himself—a happier fellow than he had been for many a day—before the governor.

‘You want to leave us—why?’ the latter inquired. ‘You’re smart enough, if inclined to be flighty; but that will wear off. You are annoyed, I suppose, at not having ferreted out that escape. But you’re young, you see, and no match for scamps who began with the reformatory.’

Then, seeing that the young man hung his head and looked confused, he dismissed him gravely, and said, an hour later, to Scarraweg :

‘That fellow’s a trafficker, I’ll swear; but he’s sorry for it, and wishes to give it up. I’ve written to Captain Jardine, who’ll take him on at Portland, and set a watch on him. Yet Captain Jardine isn’t watchful enough. The accursed race needs watching—oh, how it needs watching! These fellows who have burned their fingers make the best warders in the end—for burnt children dread the fire. Tobacco, I suppose, and so forth. I wish the Home Office would allow tobacco as the

Yankees do, and find no special ill-effect arise ; it would save a deal of bother. By-the-bye, some new prisoners will arrive by the late train. See to it.'

Mr. Scarraweg returned to his sanctum, again locked his door, and, producing his spectacles, sat down to read. What had the Reverend Aurelius been writing? Not a treatise on the Thirty-nine Articles, certainly. What was this? The concluding chapter of a book. A sort of graceful obeisance to the public before ringing down the curtain. Whatever could his book be about? Was it affecting? would its title be 'Confessions of a male Magdalen?' So this had been Mr. Tilgoe's occupation whilst pretending to be divided between a hymn-book and a Commentary on the New Testament. Stay! Here was a scrap, scrawled on the back of a picture, torn from some illustrated magazine. A letter—addressed to a lady. 'My dearest Eloïse,—Again I take up my pen, or rather my pencil, to give last directions.' He was in the habit, then, of writing to this lady—once a week possibly, or more, and always on pictures filched from library books.

Eloïse! that was not his wife's name—the gently-nurtured lady to whom he wrote four times a year, by permission, and who had fainted when she first visited him on the other side of a barred window. Evidently a former mistress this, with whom he proposed to live again—the velvet-tongued scoundrel! What did he say in this letter?

‘By the divine grace, I shall soon be out, for I have been permitted to do the authorities a favour for which, in spite of themselves, they’ll have to be grateful. I hate them—I hate them, one and all. The governor, because he’s an ass; the chief warder, because he’s a cross old curmudgeon. Herewith, I send the last pages of the book. *I vow to you that every word is true*, though it must have lacerated your sympathetic soul as you read the atrocities to which I am subjected. The public are kept out of these places, so they don’t know what goes on. I mean to tell them *from my point of view*. The way I’m used here is simply a scandal.

‘No black negro in South America ever was so treated. That they’ve not killed me

outright by their barbarity is simply due to their dread of the coroner, and my excellent constitution. If it had not been for the nice things you've sent in I should have died *of nothing but starvation* in my moist dungeon. But they'll be obliged to recognise my services and set me free. A few weeks must do it.

'You are always in my thoughts. *You—only you.* Oh, how I long to commence a new life in your sweet society—in the sole enjoyment of your matchless love! Write to me, darling, in the usual way. *Our messenger will tell you how,* in exchange for a few shillings. The book will be the talk of the town, I feel, because of its novelty and *perfect truth.*

'I send my measure, to save time, in order that you may order me a suit of clothes. *Consult your own taste.* There's a man who makes good cloth cheap somewhere in Brook Street. If he would make these togs well, I would be a constant customer to him afterwards. I shall want some shirts too, and a regular gentleman's rig-out. This misery will soon be at an end, and your love shall

repay me for all. *I live only for you, for evermore!*

‘Your *own*, oWN, OWN persecuted pet,
‘AURELIUS.’

Scarraweg rubbed the ruddy bulb at the end of his nose, and, his chin buried in his fists, stared at this literary effort.

‘Here’s the model cove as displays the beauty of the system!’ he grunted aloud. ‘A cur—a sycophant—a hypocrite—a liar—a Judas! Why not a murderer, to make it complete? Well, he’s going in for that as well, it seems—a murderer of reputations. “Your *own*, oWN, OWN,” eh? for how long I wonder? If this poor lass only knew this man’s career as I do. Let me think—what was it? At nineteen he eloped with a lady from a boarding school, under promise of marriage, and after a few months threw her on the streets. Then he married (*really* this time) the unlucky faithful creature who comes and sees him here: who was a daughter of another clergyman, brought up in the most straitlaced principles. Her health gave way after her second baby, and he saw a

means of getting rid of her, which, unhappily for her, did not succeed. In spite of her religious objections, and in spite of her ill-health, he starved and beat her until she consented to adopt the ballet as a profession. Either she would die of the draughts, he hoped, or would go to the bad, as the other one had done. But she didn't, so he tried to exasperate her into leaving him free, or committing suicide. He took a servant gal into the house, and forced his wife to wait on her, and give up her jewellery and fallals. And yet she's faithful and forgiving! Woman's a heavenly institushon, sure-lie! And then, the crime which brought him here, and which the beak said was one of the very lowest that a two-legged biped, as called himself a man, could possibly commit. The filthy swab! And now he's agoin' to start afresh with Eloïse, is he? And he's agoin' to lay his complaint afore the public, and teach 'm what's what, *when he gets out!* Ha, ha! *When he gets out!* Sure-lie, we gets rum customers in this place, which they call the "Hotel." Werry rum customers; but this is about the rummest! He's a

pictur'—what the newspapers call a silphunny—more of black than white though, about this here !'

Then Mr. Scarraweg rubbed his bald pate, as his way was when thinking aloud, and considered what his method of action ought to be.

'Isn't it hard lines I can't show him up ? Precious hard ! I must not show this lovely dockymment to the guv'nor. No. I mustn't, for I can't, without splitting on that foolish young chap who's to have another chance at Portland. No ! He must go on—but I'll write secretly to the director and give him a hint or so anonymous, on the quiet, that'll prevent his getting out. Eloïse 'll have to keep that there suit—she might put 'em on herself now and again, and practise wearing "the breeches !" And the West-end tailor, to whom he's to be reg'lar customer—what a lark ! And the book too. I wonder what it's all about ! A black nigger, eh ! He, who's in the first class, too. Ain't it a pity that we can't keep the worst scamps out of the best classes. It's good temper as does it. They know the advantage of behaving

themselves, and don't suffer enough to make 'em fly out. Well, well! Let him say his say. It can't do us much harm in the long-run !'

To the Reverend Tilgoe's surprise, orders came from the central bureau that the man by whose instrumentality the daring attempt to break out of Dartmoor prison had been prevented, was to receive no commutation of his sentence. The governor, who was considerably nettled that his recommendation should be of so little avail, made it up to his favourite by bestowing on him the best berth that a prisoner could have—that of hospital-orderly, or head-nurse in the infirmary. Was he grateful? Not he! His cards had got shuffled wrongly somehow. He was to remain as he was for several weary years—that suit of clothes would be moth-eaten and out of fashion! His servant had been removed to another station—no more letters—no more tabacco—no more tit-bits prepared by the hand of Eloïse! No matter. He would distil fresh venom each succeeding day, till his whole being was replete with gall. And—yes—he would pamper himself on the

delicacies sent in for the sick patients, and would twist the shattered limb of the 'accident,' and poke up the pillow of the moribund, if one or other dared to utter a murmur of complaint.



CHAPTER XV.

A NEW ARRIVAL.



HE excitement which had set our tiny world agog was over, and, as I expected, our bit-chains were drawn in a link, and the reins were tightened which guided our daily life. Soda was no longer one of the quarry-gang, which was a mercy; so we enjoyed comparative peace, that turbulent spirit being for a while withdrawn.

The unfortunate Miffy came back to us looking more weary than ever, attired in the yellow escape garb, and wearing leg-irons. He was a dangerous person, of course, who required special watching. Had he not made a daring and desperate attempt, within a few weeks, too, of his liberation? Still waters

run deep, you know ; there was no telling what so rash a reprobate might not try next. His dejection was painful to witness. He had lost all his marks, and forfeited all his remission. His sentence would have to be carried out to the last tittle. Instead of embracing his darlings in a month or two, at latest, he must linger through another dreary year ; and sighing, with the wistful, patient look which was so sad in him, he returned uncomplaining to his work, and dragged about his barrow with a wild energy which set his enfeebled sinews twitching. He had lost more than all this ; for in the hustling which succeeded his recapture, the precious packet of letters over which he had been used to pore, fell from his pocket, and disappeared. The Scripture-reader, whose *protégé* in some sort he was, found him lying on the floor of the punishment-cell, motionless, murmuring that he would make away with himself, that life was too heavy a burthen to be borne by one so weak as he ; and gathering from his ravings what it was that grieved him so, went off at once without another word, and wrote to Miffy's wife. Now it

was wrong and desperately wicked of this pursy old sinner to act in so sly a manner. He knew it, and felt nervous for weeks after in presence of the lynx-eyed governor; but he salved his conscience with the thought that peculiar cases require peculiar remedies, and that it behoved him to save his *protégé* from possible further rashness at the expense of a peccadillo of his own. And who will throw stones at him? When one day he trotted gaily into the cell where Miffy moaned, and pressed into his hand a letter, a brand-new one, indited but three days before, the light came back into the glazed eyes, and from that moment Miffy calmed down again and grew resigned.

Somehow we all seemed to grow calmer after the outbreak. Owing to the increased vigilance of our guardians, the daily routine proceeded with even greater precision than before—the component parts of the great machine, newly cleaned and oiled, answered without a creak to the touch of a finger on the handle. Our landing appeared especially peaceful (so soon as the damage done by the two culprits had been made good), for the

nagging of the peach-faced one was over—his worrying voice was heard no more. The two cells at the extreme end (I mean those recently occupied by Miffy and by Soda) in time received new inmates. The one at the end fell to the lot of a countryman—a harmless creature, who never could be made to believe but that the rabbits which ran along the road were intended by God for the use of the first comer. So pestilent a theory had to be combated. Local justices—this touched them on a tender point—were determined that such opinions should be put down with a strong hand ; and the countryman, declining to be convinced by their arguments, went through a series of stages, which landed him at last at Dartmoor. The other cell (the one next to me) was assigned to a young man who annoyed me at first by singing ; but after a while, the oddness of the songs he crooned roused my attention, and then amused me ; and tapping on the iron wall, I unveiled for him the secrets of the prison house, in so far as concerned the chink in our partition.

He was a singular fellow was this new

arrival—by name Tom Spevins—gifted with a contagious fund of animal spirits, which even his deplorable condition could not quite repress. The remarks he made were shrewd, yet free from the feline trait which repelled me despite myself in my intercourse with fellow-convicts. Indeed, he was unusually sturdy and independent, and affected me like a reviving whiff from the free world ; for right or wrong, he had the courage of his opinions, and stuck manfully to them. He had queer crotchets, which, in his present situation, were outrageously out of place, for he declined altogether to realise that he was a cog in the big wheel ; and accordingly commenced a war—deadly, but open and above-board—with the warders and the powers that were, which from its oddity compelled a species of respect.

I used to observe to myself with satisfaction, after a little stolen talk with him, that the interest aroused in me by this young man showed emphatically how changed I was. There could be no doubt about it, thank goodness ! Though slow, and checked by many an internal struggle, it was radical and

complete. I, the cultured painter, who a thousand years ago (it must have been a thousand) was so ardent and enthusiastic, so brimming with refined aspirations as to the artistic elevation of the masses, could listen to this fellow as to an equal—aye, and store away his sayings for private brooding and instruction. And yet my new neighbour was sharp and caustic with the shrewdness of those who have been nurtured in the dens of lowest London; and his accent was that of Whitechapel. I considered the singularity of all this many a time, but was in nowise shocked or displeased. The brummagem bearing of the gentlemanly Jaggs; the double-faced treachery of the sublime Tilgoe; were enough to sicken anyone of mock respectability. The very jargon of the new arrival was a security against that sort of thing at least. If risen from the scum, he made no attempt to pass brass for gold, or to make himself out better than he was; and from the mass of deceit and sham innocence in which I was doomed to wallow, this blunt truthfulness seemed to shine forth like virtue.

After Tilgoe's treachery with regard to the

escape, I avoided him as much as I could, and managed to take my Sunday walk, whenever it was possible, with Spevins ; whereat, no doubt, the governor shook his head, as a sign that I was utterly incorrigible. For was not Aurelius a person of superior address and education, who was edifyingly repentant and likely to do credit to the system ? and was not Spevins a stiff-necked malignant, who had got his seven years for burglary ?

Yes ; my new ally was a burglar. He was but a few years older than myself ; a tall, stalwart, fine-looking fellow, with a pair of piercing black eyes which danced when he laughed, and a perfect row of white teeth set in a great mouth. Though this was his first lagging, he had been, he admitted, a long while at the game ; but his native shrewdness, capped by the training of the Dials and the New Cut, had saved him from the claws of the police for a period of unusual length.

He began life, he told me, as a newsboy, with a *clientèle* of bachelors in chambers. Now bachelors are notoriously careless, and fall an easy prey to many robbers. When, therefore, they missed a coat or an umbrella,

or a book, or something light and portable, the blame fell, of course, upon the laundress, the notorious purloiner of sugar—whose lips were not unacquainted with the brandy-bottle—whose fingers were familiar with the tea-caddy. As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined. Hence it is not surprising that, emboldened by impunity, and rendered skilful by practice, Mr. Spevins's ambition should have developed with his years, and that petty larceny should have grown up into burglary. His acquaintanceship with letters had been strictly limited to the sale of the daily press; he had never learned to read or write, and professed to feel this misfortune very much.

'You can remedy that here,' I observed consolingly. 'There's school, you know, once a week for the illiterate. The schoolmaster and the Scripture-reader attend to that, and your cleverness will soon master the preliminaries.'

'No,' he replied, with a sigh. 'I tried it on at Pentonville during my probation, but it wasn't a bit of good. The whole thing's a farce. What can a man learn in an hour, once a week? You've forgotten on one

Monday all that you learnt the last. It's bosh. If they were to go hard at it now, and teach us for an hour a day all through that first nine months, we might do something with it ; but I don't believe they want us to learn. In fact, I heard a bloke once say that eddication was a snare to a fellar as has thoroughly gone wrong ; it only sharpens up his wits and raises the standard of his crimes. Forgery, you know, is on the increase.'

'Of course a new-fledged education alone could not hold a man back from returning to evil ways,' I admitted ; 'but, if educated when young, he might be prevented from falling. Every young child should be taught to read and write. I've heard a project mooted to force all classes to learn ; by means of a school board, or some such thing.'

'Ah ! they may do as they like about that,' grunted my companion ; 'but they'll never reach the stock I comes of.'

'They talk of having inspectors,' I explained, 'who should go round from family to family and see that the children are sent to——'

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed Spevins, mightily tickled; ‘wouldn’t I jest like to see ’em calling at my place, out Whitechapel way!—they’d get a warm welcome, I’m thinking. No, no! our class they’ll never touch, if they try till dooms-day, and more’s the pity. If I could read or write, I’d be up to all sorts of games. But there! we didn’t ought to be discontented. I’m a unedicated cove, but I’m a slap-up hand at the jemmy; you’re an edicated cove, and a regular out-and-outer with the pen, I dare swear. By the way,’ he added, turning round abruptly to examine my arm, then peering into my face, ‘I don’t want to intrude, but what might you be in for?’

‘Murder!’ I murmured sadly; do what I would, I could never get over the horror of that word.

‘Murder!’ echoed my companion, with a long low whistle, as instinctively he shrank a step away.

I scrutinised him with grim amusement, as, frowning and puckering his lips, he walked on in silence. Ha, ha! what a joke it was! How much lower was I to sink—

I, the gentleman? Here was a burglar—a vulgar, illiterate marauder of the night—who evidently was anxious, now, to shun me as too base for his companionship, and only the other day I was rejoicing in that I had so degraded myself as to associate on terms of equality with him.'

I broke into a roar at the grisly jest, and Spevins, still frowning, looked at me. But as he looked, his brow grew smoother. He was sharp enough to see, I suppose, that the laughter was skin-deep, a mere hollow braying to mask a cry of pain.

'You've a rum physog,' he mused; 'a devilish rum physog. It's young, and yet it ain't; for there are lines on it as if ploughed by cartwheels. Murder—whew!'

So he, too, was struck by the strange expression of my face. If only I could see it for myself! My comrade was much troubled in his mind.

'When breaking into houses,' I remarked, carelessly—for if we were to parade side by side it was only fair that we should use our tongues—'have you never been upon the verge of murder? To save your own life,

you surely would not stick at such a trifle as another's ?'

'I never took a life, thank the Lord!' he muttered, with a puzzled air, as though bothered by conflicting theories. 'I might have to some day in self-defence—only in self-defence—and any man is liable to that. And besides, I'm not supposed to know things like you, a toff.'

Then, as he gazed in my face, and studied my arm-badge alternately, the frown cleared quite away, and he said, more cheerfully :

'A lifer ! poor devil ! There must have been peculiar circumstances. It couldn't have been deliberate, or you'd have swung. There's my paw, and we'll say no more about it ; for I took a liking to that queer mug of yours the very first time as I see'd ye. We can't help things, that's sartain sure.' Then perceiving that I failed to comprehend this last oracular remark, he added graciously : 'What's to be, will be ; fight as you may to make it different.'

'A fatalist ?' I suggested.

'Call it what you like. The names don't carry no weight with the likes of me. A

dear old pal of mine once called his kid Etheldreda Susannah; but, as I said at the time, no good was likely to come of that. She grew up, that gal did, and robbed her own par, and bolted with a crossing-sweeper.'

'Vaulting ambition overleaps itself,' I remarked politely.

'Them's my views, howsomedever,' he continued, warming with his favourite subject. 'My views are as plain as my nose is. *I takes the odds*. That's my way; and then I runs the risk. Is the prize worth running for, or is it not? If not, leave it alone. There, you have it in a nutshell. That's what I always say. I place myself in a perticular position, and then I cries "Heads or tails!" If so be as it comes up heads, so much the better for me, and I'm jolly. If so be as it's tails, why, then I lose, but I try to be jolly still.'

'You argue,' I answered, smiling, 'by the law of probabilities.'

'This is how it is,' returned Mr. Spevins, confidentially. 'Burgling's a trade, like any other trade, with certain advantages, and certain drawbacks. An unjust society says that certain people may have a lot of things

which I haven't got, and don't look likely to have. How's that, says I? I'm as good as them—better, perhaps, barring the book-learning. They got them things without working for 'em, left by arnsisters, and sich like, therefore surelie I have better right to 'em, if I *do* work for 'em, than they have, though I've no arnsisters, as I'm aweer on.'

'That sounds incontrovertible logic,' I agreed, with admiration.

'Well, then, I studies the odds, and have done so since I were a brat. Society says I'm not to walk off with things as I haven't got, nor ain't likely to get unless I do. If I had 'em I shouldn't want any more of the same sort, so I should have no call to take 'em, should I? They starts a theory. Very well, I don't agree with it, that's all; and then, I says, I'll act agin your theory, and will take the odds as to being found out. That's the real offence—being found out. Now, there's a pal of mine in the same trade—not the one whose gal went off with the sweeper—who's done his work, and done it well and successful, and lives on the fruits of industry, as a hard-working man should when he gets in

the wale of years. Now he has laboured hard and constant, by the sweat of his brow and of his jemmy, and has never been found out. He cried "Heads!" and it turned up heads; and he—a most respectable gent now—enjoys the benefit of his luck. He bought a country estate, and keeps his carriage, and sits on a bench as a J.P., and is patronised by the nobs as one of "nature's gentlemen." He and I have acted alike—him longer than I have, 'cos he's twice as old—and he enjoys the favour of the upper crust, while I pick oakum. That ain't fair; but it's the cussed odds as are agin me. Why should he be a J.P. in clover, and I a convict? If I wasn't by natur jolly, I should be riled over that; but, I says to myself, "Better luck next time. Cheer up, old ranunculus! you've done a thing or two for a long while, and not bin found out till now! You got "seven" this turn, but you can do it on yer 'ed; others have succeeded in the end, so why shouldn't you. Better luck next time; then p'r'aps, if ye're brave and steadfast, fortun'll smile at last, and success will crown your efforts. Anyway, the result's worth trying

for. Maybe it'll be trumps next time—maybe ill-luck will follow me right through. If it do, it's not my fault ; and that'll be a comfort, although it will be hard lines.'

'Well, but,' I urged, amused by Spevine's theories, 'suppose you find luck steadily against you, will you give it up? Say, for instance, that, at the end of your present term, you are caught again and again, and so forth. Each term will be longer and longer, and the end of that will be you'll be invalided to Woking and die there. Is that cheerful?'

'That's not taking the odds,' retorted my companion, poking his thumb into my ribs. 'I'm thirty years old, and this is my first sentence, and I shouldn't be here now if there hadn't bin a muddle. There are hosts of habituels who never serve more than one sentence, because during that one lagging they've a chance of learning such a jolly lot of experience. They ain't caught twice. If a few of us were to organise under the direction of some one with a clear nut, there wouldn't be those muddles, and we should get along for ever without being caught ; but never mind that now. Do you suppose

this lagging hasn't taught me lots of lessons already? And do you suppose that I shan't be quick to profit by them? They won't catch me the same way agin, I can tell 'em. I hope still to make something nice to retire on, and then turn respectable, though I ain't got the edication to become a J.P. Respectable? who so glad as I to be respectable if I hev' the chance? I'll try agin, and yet agin, so long as I hev' strength; and if my time comes before I turn respectable, very well, then I've done my best, and it ain't my fault, and I'll wash my hands, and there's an end of it.'

Is it to be wondered at that I grew interested in this man? He opened to me a new view of crime, which was refreshing in that it was straightforward and founded upon a logical basis. His behaviour in prison was good, of course (he committed no serious offences, I mean), because he was burning to remedy this first *faux pas*, and to recommence a promising career with the benefit of the fresh experience that he was learning. Yet at the same time he waged his petty warfare with the warders—so open, so

devoid of the usual convict attributes, as to amaze both the governor and Mr. Scarraweg, and to cause them often to look leniently upon his shortcomings on account of their audacity and his good-humour, and to treat them somewhat as a joke.

But for all his good-humour, he chafed bitterly under 'the system,' and there was no doubt that he would escape a second lagging if sharpness of wits could ensure that end. Curious enough, in our two cases extremes met, for it was the network of small harassing knots which galled the flesh of both of us. As far as I was concerned, they wounded me less and less, because I had arrived, or thought I had, at the final condition of apathy. Not so with Spevins, who, despite his oddity, was a type of one class of the habitual criminal. He writhed under the monotony of his prison life as under a flail. The criminal mind has a tendency to be erratic, and to abhor, on account of their straightness, the paths of order. It was by being unable to keep to the groove traced by society, that he of the broad arrow came to grief; how ineffably

galling, then, must a yet more direful restraint be to him who is nothing if not crooked ?

‘ I can’t abear this ! ’ Spevins sighed sometimes, in moments of dejection, through our chink, as Pyramus might to a sympathetic Thisbe. ‘ I wants summat to be different, even if it were to be worse. That’s what smashes me ! ’ he groaned. ‘ What’s the good of telling us we’ve warmth and lights and all that ? What’s books to me as can’t read ’em, and ain’t given a fair chance to learn ? And the reg’lar rotation of dinners—I hate to know that on Toosday I’m to have meat, and on Thursday I’m to have pudden. And then church to the minute ; and, most exasperating of all, a long sermon, upon nothing but bread and cheese on Sundays. If we’re to listen to a long jaw, which we can’t understand, and don’t want, surely we should have summat warm in our stommicks to comfort us ? Oh, golly ! ain’t it dull ! And the whitewashed walls with not a speck of dirt on ’em. I’d rather hev’ no light but that of a dark lantern, with the chance of a spree in a big house as is all closed up. I may get

my skull cracked—I may crack somebody else's by misfortin'. It's the glorious uncertainty of our trade as is so captiwatin'. I *hates* my cell, and my clean bedding, and my bright pots and cans that wink at me. Always to do things at the same hour—at the same minit ! It's enough to wear a man to fiddle-strings. I'd as soon be a sea-an—what d'ye call it?—one of them round things as look like boils more or less inflamed that are stuck about the rocks in the aqueerums.'

Poor fellow ! He did chafe under the routine of bells and gongs. Many a dreadful quarrel did he have with old Scarraweg, because he would not fold up his blankets in the required shape.

'I ain't got no pictures to amuse me here,' he used to complain, 'so I settle my things different jest for variety. What can it be to you—except for the sake of aggerawatin'—if the blankets are folded square, or oblong, or three-cornered ? It's well you've not made a tailor of me. I'd sew all the coats and trousers lob-sided, that I would, even though I lost marks by it. The temptation to create a surprise would be too strong !'

And old Scarraweg, though he frequently had fearful tussles with my neighbour on the grand subject of these same blankets and pots and pans, generally had a smile lurking in the neighbourhood of his Newgate frill, when he left him to come on to me.

Somehow or another the new prisoner took an invincible dislike to Tilgoe, not that that worthy made the smallest effort to propitiate him, for he was as much too low as he was much too open to please the male Magdalen. Spevins even took upon himself to scold me if he seemed to hear me singing with the parson in chapel. Not that I cultivated that worthy's society now, though ; for even if I could have stomached his treachery, I should have been repelled by his bad temper. Indeed, he was no longer a pleasing companion ; for the chief warder (remembering that letter to Eloïse) pursued him, as Orestes might have been pursued by a fury in blue cloth — three vengeful pursuers rolled, like Cerberus, into one. He was not comfortable, and his amiability suffered by reason of the Nessus shirt which Scarraweg compelled him to wear. The ferret eye of Scarraweg was

somehow always turned on the infirmary. When delicacies were sent in for special patients, with which good things the hospital orderly would fain have comforted himself, Scarraweg somehow would linger in the ward, and engage the chief nurse in provoking conversation till the said delicacies were gone beyond his reach. It occurred sometimes to the latter, to wonder with misgivings whether the peach-faced one had blabbed before he left. For his own sake, that seemed improbable; but be that as it might, Tilgoe no longer dwelt on a bed of roses, and the thorns which the ingenious chief warder stuck in him were by no means conducive to serenity.

I explained one day to Spevins the hopes and aspirations connected with 'the book.' At first he was immensely tickled, and said :

'Good man!' Then, as he wielded his pick (he was with us in the quarry), he seemed not so certain about it; and finally, regardless of the attendant warder and civil-guards, flung down his tool and spat upon the ground. 'Let be, mate!' he sang out to our guardian. 'I've a foul taste in my

mouth, that's all ; don't worrit, you aggerawatin' cuss !' and, after that, he avoided the interesting penitent as though he had been a leper.

With Jaggs, it was otherwise. They sniffed at one another at first, like dogs who have not been introduced ; but ultimately got on pretty well, exchanging experiences after a fashion which entertained me no little. Both were equally incapable of distinguishing *meum* from *tuum* ; both were equally ready to avail themselves of the latter ; but as the *modus operandi* of each was different, they were enabled mutually to improve each other.

The end at which cool-headed Jaggs was in the habit of arriving by legerdemain, Spevins reached by force of crowbar ; hence Jaggs, in his conversations, assumed an air of genteel condescension, as became an artist who thought fit to be affable to an artisan, which was in a high degree comical. But, although they got along well enough, Spevins was at heart a very different personage from Jaggs. He was charitable in his dealings with other prisoners—could interest himself

in their affairs from unselfish motives, and was generally liked in consequence, and Jaggs looked on these traits with contempt, tempered by pity, as spots which marred a really very promising character.

I remember the two, both of whom prided themselves on good-humour, having a genuine quarrel once, on the subject of Spevins's brother, who, it appeared, was an honest workman, who enjoyed a position of confidence in a large warehouse. They were talking in the quarry about what they would do when they got out (fruitful source of conversation!), and Jaggs proposed that they should join forces and employ the honest brother as a 'stall.' The stalwart Spevins was so enraged at the mere suggestion, that he turned on the genteel one, and would have done him a serious injury had I not intervened; then, shaking himself together as a wet retriever does, he said with unusual fierceness:

'I'm a good-natured sort, I am; but don't you try them games again. I never goes within a mile of my brother, cos it'd harm 'im to be seen with the likes o' me. He

prefers honesty—I don't. It's a mere difference of opinion—he goes his ways and I goes mine, and there's no bad blood between us.'

Now conduct so indecent to one who had certainly been no more than indiscreet was very lamentable. Jaggs was deeply wounded, and sulked awhile. Then remembering that it is the prerogative of a superior being to be magnanimous, he plumed his ruffled feathers; that is, he adjusted his neckcloth, and said, with his light laugh :

'Don't be so precious cross about nothing. Quarrelling's vulgar. Difference of opinion, eh? Then let it be a difference of opinion between us also, and nothing more. What suits you may not suit me, as the sick gent said, whose pet cat brought him a mouse every day, and sat on the quilt while he pretended to eat it.'

The elaborate castles in the air which were erected by these two masons with an eye to the future, were lovely to behold; and I felt a sly pleasure in drawing them out.

'The time during which it is your unfortunate lot to occupy this hotel,' I observed

one day, 'is short; and you neither of you seem to appreciate its advantages. You are both bright enough and energetic enough, Lord knows. Why not for variety try the other lay—you who so dearly love a change?'

'The square!' Spevins exclaimed, staring as if he thought I must be mad.

'The square!' Jaggs murmured, plaintively; for the remembrance of that work-house episode was humiliating.

'Yes, the square,' I returned, with a composure which it was no easy matter to maintain.

Spevins wagged his head like an indulgent parent who discovers that even his swans have frailties. He thought that it was sad to see that 'educated coves' should be so lacking in common sense, and was about to enlighten my mind with paternal indulgence, when Jaggs pensively took up his parable.

'Ah,' he said; 'don't remind me of that past, and taunt me with my weakness. Haven't I told you that when your head's been cropped, it's midsummer madness to think of turning honest? The country's over-populated; the labour market's over-

stocked. If men whose lives are blameless can't get work, how can the blemished sheep expect to do so? "Where's your character?" "Haven't got one." "Then clear out, and make room for the thousands who have." I thought I had clearly demonstrated to you once before that all a man can do who is placed as you and I are, is to patch up the holes in his armour, so that the police may not be able to thrust in their spear. He must say to himself, I can't turn honest—that's out of the question; and the knowledge that it's impossible is a relief, for it saves argument. But if it don't pay me to be honest, I can grow leery, and that pays. The leerier I grow, the more likely I am to make a success in life, the less likely to be detected, and the longer I shall be before returning to the hotel.'

'Hear, hear!' cried the approving Spevins. 'Them's my sentiments to a T. As I always says, it's a matter of being found out—nothing else. I've seen heaps of cases of chaps who tried to reform—but, bless your soul, it was waste of precious time. Their system, they make such a palaver about, don't

reform nobody. Punishment's to be deterrent, they says—go and behave yourselves; and they kick us out into the world again, as we all know, without the smallest chance of taking their advice. We know that, but here's another thing. In some cases they do wuss. An ignorant devil like me comes in, we'll say, who's never had his mind disturbed as to whether he did right or wrong, and who was 'appy and contented in his conscience. Then, we'll say, being confused and upset by the novelty of the affair, he listens to the patter of the parson, and p'raps (though that's unlikely) learns to write and read in quod, and goes out steadfastly purposing, as they put it, to lead a new life. What comes of it? Not only do circumstances over which, consequent on his position, he's no control drive 'im back to the old game; but heving been taught 'e didn't ought to do it, *they've made him miserable as well!*

'Hum!' murmured the pensive Jaggs. 'I went through it all, I'm ashamed to say; and I confess it didn't make me miserable. It made me laugh. If I'd got into a com-

fortable berth, I daresay I should have grubbed along without murmuring, for I'm easily pleased; but I didn't, and I don't regret that now, though I am slaving myself inside out in a draughty quarry. For those who have honest proclivities the case stands thus: The system isn't deterrent, and *never will be*, so long as a fellow isn't sure that if he wants to reform he has a fair chance.'

'Hear, hear!' acquiesced the other. 'Lords and ladies would be bad enough, I dessay, if they had empty stommicks!'

'The only employment which an ex-convict has a prospect of getting,' pursued Jaggs, 'is bricklaying, or trenching, or some such thing which demands no character, and which is no less severe than what is inflicted in prison as a punishment. To a person who was not by trade a tiller of the soil, it's as bad as hard labour, with this added—that instead of being warmed and clothed and fed free gratis, he's got to keep himself on nothing a week.'

'It seems a "no thoroughfare,"' I added, wondering whether Tilgoe had touched on this in his great book. 'And yet, after all,

it isn't the system's fault, or the fault of the Prisoners' Aid Societies, except in so much as that they profess with a mighty blowing of trumpets to do that which they can't possibly accomplish. It's the fault of the public, who are indignant because something isn't done which can only be accomplished by themselves. Their servants cannot perform miracles. If they will not see for themselves after the future welfare of prisoners, it's their own fault if their "system" is made null and void.'

'Oh, go along!' retorted Spevins. 'Prisoners' Aid and rubbish! I hate cant and professions. I feel with the man who never picked pockets except at church or chapel; and who excused himself by saying that though he was honest on weekdays, he could never help going wrong on Sunday, because these people all pretend to be so much better than their neighbours!'

In this wise we three grew into a habit of conversing, and all equally appreciated the friendly intercourse; yet for some queer reasons Spevins always showed a decided partiality for me, and even listened with a certain respectful deference to my remarks

which he did not do to those of others, being opinionated and obstinate. But at the same time he established a principle of mutual improvement, presuming to take me to task pretty roundly now and then ; and, entering into his humour, I always hearkened to what he said.

A fruitful source of discussion was the blackness of my penal sheet. Spevins, although always breaking tiny lances with the warders, rarely got reported. I was continually appearing before the governor, for my manner was sullen ; and it was a pleasant safety-valve for the warder's spleen to report the ill-conditioned and morose.

‘ Why not behave yourself a bit, and be comfortable ? ’ my comrade urged coaxingly. ‘ You don’t mind the bells and gongs and aggravatin’ clockwork ways as I do ; so you’ve no excuse. You did when you first came here, eh ? And how long ago might that have been ? You don’t know or care, ’cos you never counted ? Nonsense ! That’s mere gammon. You must know.’

‘ Well then,’ I confessed, ‘ about four and a half years, as near as I could remember.’

But what could it signify to me? What were five years out of a lifetime?—a drop in the ocean of gall, which would not bear thinking of.

‘And still in the third class!’ he exclaimed, glancing reprovingly at my black collar; ‘instead of the first, where you might have been.’

‘Loads of time!’ I said with bitterness. ‘Haven’t I all my life before me?’

‘Well—but if you behave yourself, you may be out in twenty years!’

‘*May* be out!’ I scoffed. ‘Don’t gabble in that tantalizing way! A pretty prospect. But as it happens, I would rather stay where I am.’

‘Don’t want to get out!’ exclaimed the burglar. ‘What! Make your bed in the same shape every day till you’re an old man! Why’s that? You must be cracked!’

‘Mad—how I wish I were?’ I groaned, raising my arms longingly. ‘Why’s that? Because four years and a half ago I died, and was buried. Yet, still to my sorrow, I linger on the earth!’

Spevins looked grave, and said no more; but was evidently ruminating over this whim-

sical position, and turning it round in all its aspects. Though morose, and generally looked upon as ill-conditioned, I was at this time tolerably callous, and seldom raised the veil which masked the smouldering fire ; and when I did, it seemed always like a fresh discovery. Yet, impelled by some hidden spring, I chose to raise it for this common fellow ; for even at this stage the sympathy of anybody was better than none. He appeared much impressed—not to say awe-stricken, by so new a spectacle as that at which I permitted him to peep ; and returned again and again to the charge, with caution as though treading on cat's ice ; and it did me good—all the more, perhaps, because he was a vulgar burglar, nurtured in London slime—to let him see the branding-iron which was silently eating away my flesh.

Spevins was the direct antithesis to myself—and this was perhaps the reason why we cottoned to each other. He, shrewd, cheery, a favourite with all, declined altogether, as I have said, to accept the broad lines within which society elects to be governed ; and having framed a code of his own, acted with

conviction according to its tenets, without questioning the firmness of its basis : nothing could be more simple and plain sailing. I, on the other hand, speculative and impulsive, was constantly vexing my brain about causes for phenomena. I knew that I was callous, and yet that I was not. I knew that the fire glowed, whilst I vowed that it was ashes. I deceived myself and others, partly in real ignorance, partly with a morbid intention of hugging my griefs. In my complex state I was absolutely sure of one thing alone—and that was, that I was a martyr, unjustly on the rack ; and so, whilst accepting my fate as inevitable, I nourished still, as much as in my days of wild despair, a fervid rage and hatred against those who had placed me on that rack.

The well-meaning Scripture-reader, smitten by conscience in that he had done so little to save the soul of the arch-reprobate, took to paying me weekly visits, which nearly drove me frantic. He kept repeating that I was where I found myself through my own fault, and that therefore I ought to bow in meekness and kiss the rod which smote me. To which I invariably replied that it was not so ;

that I was where I was through misfortune ; that the crime which I had committed was not murder, but the having in one evil moment imbibed a glass too much—whereat the worthy old gentleman sighed and raised his hands, and went away declaring that I was hopeless. We fought this battle on an average once a week, with always the same result—twice a week when I flew out and got into disgrace ; for when in the punishment cells, the good man always made a point of improving the occasion by a lecture and by reading me some tit-bit from Jeremiah. Those awful denunciations of wrath to come ! The effect they produced upon me—a prisoner in a darkened cell—could be none other than a hardening one. The wrath for me was there. I had already gone through more than I deserved. The only grace I asked was to be left in peace ; and that was the especial one which the Scripture-reader refused to grant me.

Spevins, to whom many of my arguments and speculations were mere words, embraced the main points of the situation, and set himself to change my state of mind. He saw that I was

without hope, and strove to inspire me with such hope as he could give. What an incongruous pair of propagandists! One pointed towards heaven; the other to the world without; and both goals seemed equally unattainable.


The words of the burglar rang in my ears, without convincing me. Friendless, homeless, penniless, what would become of me, if ever I were to get out? What possible object would be attained by so behaving as, years hence, to obtain reconsideration of my sentence? Should I find myself compelled to take to burglary—to join the dusky stream and return here a vulgar criminal instead of a martyr? It was evident that I was right in desiring to stop where I was. If society, having once branded her victims, refused to allow them to be honest, what was the use of going through the worry of good behaviour to obtain release? Release! To what end? No! It was surely better to make no attempts, which could only be futile and heart-breaking; but to accept the inevitable with phlegm because it could not be avoided, and to trouble my head no whit at all about the world from which I was severed.

Yet Spevins, though I tried to stop him, would talk to me about it in his illiterate way, and unconsciously, as he rambled on, I found myself dreaming of the world—its pangs, its joys, its beauty—and had to mutter between my teeth, ‘*Vade retro sathanas!*’ more and more frequently, till, losing my enforced calm, I became well-nigh as tempest-tossed as of yore; and lost grain by grain my hardly-won repose.



CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT WILL EBENEZER DO ?

‘ SEES it all !’ Spevins used to say ;
‘and I don’t wonder at yer goin’
queer in yer nut ; but ye’re wrong,
for if we’re hunted down we ought to die
game, and ye’re not dying game. If a bloke
gives me one in the optic, do I lie down and
howl ? Too much of a Britisher I hope for
that, if a humble one. What do I do ? Why,
I gives him that one back agin, and just
another little un in the bread-basket, to re-
mind ’im not to do it no more.’

This was a new view, which had not oc-
curred to me. And, perceiving that I was
interested, Mr. Spevins’s beady eyes danced,
and he showed his even white teeth as he
proceeded with his *rôle* of respectful Mentor.

The gist of his counsel was, that being a victim of ill-usage, I was bound in self-defence to retaliate upon my persecutors—not the warders; he didn't mean that, though he hated them for their exactitude with a deadly hate—but upon society in general. My line, he urged, should have been from the beginning to have behaved admirably, to have got my temper well under control. ('Had I not done so beyond my expectations?' I cried. He had never seen the peach-faced jack-anapes who had been so great a torment to me.) This done, he said, I ought to have got some one to petition Government, in order that my case might be reconsidered on account of my angelic conduct; and as it really was a peculiar and unusual case, it was quite upon the cards that if I had made friends with those above me, they might have drawn the attention of the Home Secretary to it, even before the regulation twenty years were up. Then, proceeded Mentor, would come the time for my revenge. Set free on license, I would make it my business to plant myself as a thorn in the flank of those who had ill-used me—not by the cowardly means whereby

Tilgoe proposed to arrive at the same end—but by good wholesome warfare. I had great abilities, he was kind enough to assure me; from habit of thought I could think out a thing quickly, which would be a battle to a less cultured brain; could combine and dovetail apparently incongruous elements with ease (these are my words, not his), and might therefore become, if so resolved, a very serious enemy to the champions of law and order.

‘If, for example,’ Spevins said, ‘you chose to come down our way and be a commander-in-chief, there’s many a cracksman as’d be too glad to serve under a clever bloke like you. You’d be the ’ed and we the arms, as it were; and then see what a lot we could do by organisin’. You’d be the string to bind the sticks together. It’d be your place to keep dark—precious dark, so as not to be nabbed; but you’d direct the business from under the table, so to speak, and ’ave spies about as’d tell you where the plate was, and my lady’s jewel-box. For instance we’d soon raise the blunt to put you in a pub. Not a low public-house, but summat spicy and slap-up, with plate-glass and lots of gas, in the

quarter where the nobby footmen live. We couldn't do that sort of thing ourselves, you see—we'd be spotted immediate; the nobby footmen wouldn't consort with the likes of us—they're altogether too nobby and refined for that. But a toff like you'd be the very article. They'd be honoured and proud to know yer; and butlers even'd be flattered when you dined with 'em in th' room; and you'd not know us at all, bein' such a high-faluting bar-keeper, and so mortal stuck-up and aristocratic as you'd be. So the pleece, drat 'em, would never suspect the admired of the butlers and walleys of anything shady, and you'd get to know 'ow the land lay in every slap-up 'ouse in the West-end, and the numbers of the servants, and hour of dining, and all the rest of it; and you'd jist take a saunter of a summer evening down to the East-end, smoking of a sixpenny Havannah, and I or some one else would meet you quite by accident, and you'd give us a straight tip which would be the making of the lot of us. You might even go farther,' concluded this brilliant genius, whose invention grew with the food it fed on. 'You

might make a dead set at the Secretary of State hisself, and the Chairman and Directors of the Prisons Department—they as make all our lives so miserable—and we'd not leave so much as a silver salt-spoon among the lot, or a ring or an earring among their old gals? My jimminy—what a squallin' and a yelpin' there'd be! That'd be revenge, wouldn't it? *Golly, just!*

Mr. Spevins's ingenious word-pictures filled me, despite the warnings of reason, with wild longings, and caused my heart to leap up and show that it was alive, even while I tried to persuade myself that it was dead. But this was a wild dream—nothing more; a nocturnal vision starting from false premises, as nocturnal visions have a way of doing. Twenty years hence! What signified it what should occur twenty years hence? It was too far off to look forward to. Where would this Mentor be by that time—he who proposed to set all this machinery in motion? His own sentence would be up in six years; I should have served about eleven; half the allotted twenty, before my case could even be

reconsidered ! That idea of making friends with my keepers, with a distinct if distant object, was of a piece with the rest. Spevins would go out and come back again, perhaps, with a fresh lagging, or get hanged for killing some one in a burglary. How futile it all was ; and yet I was surprised to find how sorry I was that it should be so. The adverse fate which had made of me a willing companion of felons, had developed the savage element which is at the bottom of all our natures. With such an object I felt that I really could have mustered courage to face the world again. How strange ! Less than five years ago I was an artist and a gentleman. Now I found myself thirsting to become a burglars' fence, a betrayer of honest confidence, a seducer of confiding men, a devourer of precious souls, a scourge wherewith to lash those who, as I considered it, had crushed and broken my own life.

Only in vague theory though ; such a thing could never be put into practice. It was an idle vision that my friend Spevins was conjuring up to comfort me, and to pour upon my wounds the balm of hope. What had I—

the lifer—to do with Hope? It was a cruel kindness to disturb my peace.

Jaggs, of course, heard all about this, and, whilst applauding the ingenuity of the notion, affected to touch it with supercilious digits.

‘I don’t believe in burglaries,’ he observed sententiously. ‘They are indelicate and in-artistic; besides, you admit that, thanks to the increased efficiency of the police and the earlier closing of public-houses, burglaries become more and more difficult to accomplish satisfactorily. They lead to bloodshed, too—dirty, as well as dangerous. I look on the trade as a fine art, and regret that it should be degraded by the doings of commonplace delinquents. No doubt,’ he added, with a polite inclination of the head, ‘our friend here would, if opportunity offered, add refinement and polish to the business; but really, crowbars and jemmies, and such things, and hats with masks attached—I declare quite like the Middle Ages! This is an age of progress; we ought to have risen above that.’

When Jaggs assumed this tone, Spevins grew riled.

‘You’re all wick and no fat, like a farden

dip !' he cried, with indignation. ' You think a deal of yourself, you chatterbox, because your fingers are like sarpints. I see no difference myself, in the way of art, between a man who can bust open an iron safe and walk off with the goods, and have a bit of supper and leave all clean and ship-shape, without waking so much as a cat ; and another man who picks a pocket without its owner a-feelin' of it.'

' Don't talk like that,' implored Jaggs, with the sudden access of innocence which always came over him when he heard spades called spades : ' that's not it at all. It's mental aberration combined with a rare sense of touch. Don't we all do things unconsciously—put something down on a table, for instance, and then look everywhere for it except in the proper place ? Involuntary action of the mind. Why not the same with me when I find some one else's watch in my own pocket by mistake ? There's where the injustice comes in. If I were a duchess, it would be called kleptomania ; why was I not born a duchess ? In my case they don't even pay homage to the talent of the unconscious artist. Disgusting !'

‘I take it you know little about our branch of the profession,’ pursued Spevins, doggedly ; for he, too, was in his way an artist, and had no idea of being put upon by Jaggs. ‘Middle Ages, indeed ! Some of our instruments are tip-top. When I saw the knives and scissors in the International Exhibition, I thought they were nothing to our things, and felt almost sorry some of us hadn’t sent a case—a case of jemmies, and another of skeleton-keys. It would have been novel and entertaining ; though after all it’s as well, perhaps, to let ’em see the results, rather than ’ow it’s done—like the conjurors and spirit-mediums. The patent instrument for turning window-latches, for instance, is a pretty toy ; so are the expanding centre-bits which, by turnin’ of a little screw, ’ll make a hole in a door in a jiffy, either to let your arm in or a boy through, as may be most convenient. Why, I’ve a jemmy of my own—or had, till the coppers prigged it (and they call us thieves !)—which is a perfect pictur’. It’s made of the finest tempered steel, and unscrews into short lengths which fit in special pockets, under the arms and

inside the legs, like bits of baccy-pipe. No one would dream as you had a jemmy on yer. Now, in the old days we used to be obliged to have a woman with us to carry the pieces under her crinoline, and it's best to have no woman in these matters, for they squall and have hysterics. Then there's a new thing—werry simple, but effective, and sweetly pretty—a kind of leaden mallet, square, and fearful heavy, with a peculiar leather flap-arrangement on the striking side, which you must wet well before using. If you keep it oozy, you may strike tremenjous blows without fear of bein' overheard, or waking up a fly. Did yer have all that in the dark ages, I'd like to know ?

'Anything neat in ladders now ?' suggested Jaggs, whose vanity was tickled by the protest his diatribe had aroused. 'Say something light and springy—hickory tipped with steel, and your brass-plate and address complete ?'

'Oh, ladders !' responded the other, with contempt. 'You're a nice one to lay down the law, if you don't know better than that ! Ladders ain't fashionable now ; that is, we

can get on without 'em, unless the winder as we're coming out of is breakneck 'igh. Of course a ladder's never used to get *into* a 'ouse with. But if you've settled to leave by a perticklar bedroom, say, it's as well to put a ladder outside and a wedge under the door; so that, if you're disturbed, you can slide comfortably down while the people are grumblin' in the passage. That's A B C work, that is.'

'Is that so?' I asked; for the arrangement seemed of classical simplicity to my ignorant mind.

'In course it is,' grunted the burglar. 'If people, when they find a door locked on the inside, were immediately to run round to where the winder is, instead of cackling like geese in the passage, and trying the door-handle, there'd be more of us caught than what there is. But it 'ud come to the same in the end, for we should have to set our wits to work and do different.'

'I admit you are smart,' cried Jaggs, with approval—'uncommon smart and quick. There are pretty points in your branch of the profession which are new to me, and

yet—— To be sure, your hands are too wide, and your fingers too stumpy, ever to achieve excellence in my line; not but what practice will do a deal. The effect of practice is quite unexpected sometimes.'

'That was true,' I thought to myself. 'To wit, Miffy's case, when the genteel one starved him merely to keep his hand in.'

'By-the-bye,' Spevins said, throwing down his pick to indulge more freely in a sudden shout of merriment, 'you know that, though I'm an old un at the game, this is my first stretch? Do you know how I once got off when the beak was agoin' to commit me for trial? It was only a short offence—a matter of pouring some 'ot water over my old 'ooman—which were an accident, becos' I really didn't know it was so werry warm; but then it was important I shouldn't be committed, for I couldn't get bail, and when a cove's locked up his business goes wrong, and things crop up that want a sharp eye to keep 'em quiet. So what did I do, do you suppose? That was smart, I can tell you. I borrowed all the pawn-tickets I possibly could from the cabmen on the rank outside the pleece-court

—they allers have lots about 'em—and when the beak was agoing to make a speech, I began to cry like the deluge, and whipped my handkercher out of my pocket, and, with it, all the pawn-tickets. One shawl, a shilling ; one sheet, a penny ; one pair of boots, with the sidesprings out, three-halfpence, and so on. Sensation in court ! “ Poor fellow ! ” cried the women, who knew the look of them tickets too well. “ What’s all that ? ” cried the beak, startled. “ Why, blow’d,” he says, “ if the man ain’t pawned all he’s got ! ” Then I gurgled and said I begged the ladies’ and gents’ pardons, and ’umbly begged ’em to forgive me for being so mortal poor, though I always did my best, to hide it, being proud ; but it was wexin’ to the temper, which must account for the ’ot water. And then there was a murmur of pity all round, and the beak let me off cheap, with something from the poor-box to get the blanket out of pawn, while the lovely creaturs in the body of the court poured their ’alfpence into my cap !

‘ Yes, you certainly are smart—uncommon smart,’ admitted the sententious Jaggs, with curves of admiration puckering his thin

cheeks. 'I really don't know—'pon my honour and word—whether it might not, indeed, be better to amalgamate when we go out. I've turned the question over and over, and I think it really would. Any way, we've lots of time, worse luck, to think about it.'

It was amusing to me to mark that the burglar could wind the last speaker round his finger, for all his vapouring patronage.

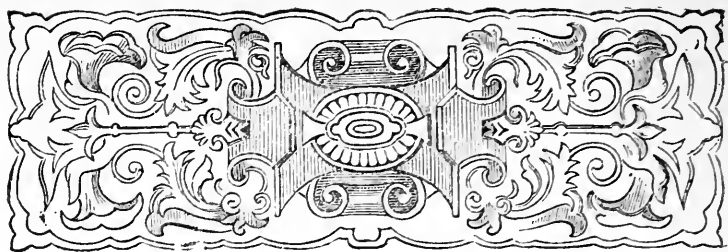
'I wish Y 122 could join us as well,' observed Spevins, glancing at me with bright kindly eyes, as he stood leaning on his pick. 'It seems a cruel shame that he should never get out of this.'

Jaggs shrugged his shoulders with indifference.

'What's that to you? It's his own look-out. If he likes to stop here, why shouldn't he?'

'Why should he not?' I thought to myself, as I wiped my brow to conceal my troubled face. Jaggs was 'more sensible than Spevins after all. 'Would it not be better, much better, that I should stop here? Even were it really possible that I ever could get out, would it not be best for me to remain under

watch and ward than to go out to perform the mission of an iconoclast? But how absurd the notion was! Of course it could never be—must never be. Although I had slain one man unconsciously, his reproachful features never haunted me, for I did not remember having even ever looked on them. It was an accident, and I a martyr. But this was different. How could I go deliberately forth to be a slayer of souls—to lay pitfalls for the feet of the unwary? to coax unsuspecting servants to their ruin? No! The *rôle* of a martyr is better than that of an avenger. To conquer, some must stoop; my neck was too stiff for stooping. So I looked gloomily at Spevins, and clapped him on the back, and felt a queer liking for the homely, unlettered fellow; but though my mind was much perturbed, I resolutely looked away from the pictures he conjured up, refusing in anywise to practise meekness, or to imitate the penitent but now irate Tilgoe, or to move so much as my little finger to propitiate the powers that were.



CHAPTER XVII.

57 PARTY.



HE good Scripture-reader found Miffy as tractable as a lamb, so soon as he had touched him with the talisman from home ; but it was not so easy to put salt upon the tail of Soda. So soon as he found himself again in the familiar yellow jacket, with irons on his sturdy legs, the viler portion of his evil nature, which had been dozing fitfully, suddenly woke up and resumed dominion. The devil within him was wide awake now. For a day or two he was cowed and negatively easy to manage, in consequence of the hardships and hunger he had undergone ; but a little rest between the blankets and a term of penal diet (excellent meal porridge made with milk) restored to

him sufficient strength to become actively disagreeable. In the punishment-cell, where he was put to crank-labour, he declined with scoffs to turn the handle.

‘Not such a fool!’ he cried, with a torrent of blasphemy.

Scarraweg argued with him; the governor curled his white moustache and glared at him, then ordered bread and water. He only sat on his bed-place with massive legs stretched out, shaking his irons and pouring forth a volley of curses.

‘Bread and water, by all means,’ he gibed, ‘the more the better;’ for that would play the dickens with his constitution, and oblige them to send him into hospital.’

‘If I might only use the cat!’ muttered the little martinet, as he retired to his office. ‘That would bring him to his bearings. They don’t allow us the cat half enough. Well, well, this is fictitious courage. It will wear off, and then——’

But it showed no signs of wearing off. There was no reason why it should. He was right when he suggested that bread and water, if persisted in, would land him in the in-

firmly—the convict's heaven. He knew, none better, that if he kept within certain bounds, he stood in no danger of whipping—the convict's hell. Moreover, so soon as it was decided that he was to join 57 Party, his spirits rose, and he broke forth into discordant song, and turned up his cuffs, as it were, to go to work in earnest; for in that band, wherein all the powers hostile to human happiness run riot, a lurid glory was to be gained, such as his brutal instincts could well appreciate. It would be brave fun to out-Herod Herod in the special gang, and win the admiration of those demons. 57 Party consisted at this time of some twenty wild beasts, all of them wearing leg-irons, all clad in a peculiar costume—parti-coloured mustard and orange, or black and drab—to indicate the nature of the latest outrage. One, a fragile youth with a hang-dog visage, a shoemaker, had playfully thrust his awl, a few days since, into his neighbour's flesh, instead of into his shoe-leather; another had inveigled a warder into his cell, and, springing at him like a tiger, had sawed his throat with a tin dinner-knife. A third had gnawed off the

ear of a fellow-prisoner who had declined to part with some tobacco. A fourth—but why go through the humiliating catalogue? not one of them but had fairly won his spurs; not a wretch amongst them but was torn by spite, rage, lying, malice, jealousy; not a fiend among the crew but was ready to go all lengths, provided he could evade the cat. For many of them (those, that is, who wore the black assault-dress) had tasted the pleasure of the triangles; had howled and writhed and shrieked for mercy as the blood ran down their backs. These had enjoyed the insidious caresses of the nine knotted tails, and desired not again to come within their reach; yet, banded together as they were, there was no telling to what one might urge another on; for, isolated though they were supposed to be, they knew each others' voices and sang such things to each other, by day in the workshop, by night from cell to cell, as caused those less-depraved-ones who were within hearing to shiver between their sheets.

Most of them showed signs of something more decided than the ordinary crookedness

of convicts. They were clearly not lunatics, being conscious of what they did, and doing it deliberately. Neither were they, like Miffy, half-witted. On the contrary, their wits were in a wrong direction singularly clear-cut and well-defined ; yet were they undoubtedly weak-minded, one and all, trembling on the verge of madness—not amenable to the ordinary influences which are supposed to guide mankind. They were peculiarly subject to bursts of temper and passion, as unreasonable as beyond control, to the committing of strange and eccentric acts—mutilation of their own bodies nearly as much as injury to fellow-prisoners. There was method in their madness though, for, dangerous wild beasts though they assuredly were, they had been taught, save in rare instances, to keep their claws from off their keepers.

The members of 57 Party occupied the lowest tier of cells in one of the great halls. By day they sojourned in a long shed, wherein was a series of stalls like those in a stable, with a narrow passage running along the front, where a warder paraded up and down. Thus they were always under his ob-

servation, whilst they could not see each other; yet this was an abortive precaution, for, as I said just now, they knew each others' voices and snapped their fingers at ordinary rules. Why was it that, the whole band being under charge of one individual, they did not rend him limb from limb? Because such molestation would have entailed the CAT. That was the solitary punishment which all dreaded in equal degree, be their original offence what it might; and this reminds me of a curious fact, of the truth of which anyone will be assured who is given to the study of penal records. The men who from time to time, in the various convict-prisons, drift into the special party, have nearly always been convicted either of arson, rape, or robbery with intent. Why is this? Why not murder? Yet no; murderers who are in for life are usually quiet and well-behaved—a proof that those who commute death-sentences make few mistakes.

Being in terror of the cat, the members of 57 Party were careful to avoid such malpractices as would bring them to the triangles; but it was beyond the power of their guardian to

maintain silence or any sort of order, or even to cause them to refrain from filthy language. Any person passing by that shed during daylight was sure to hear such a weird, strong-lunged, foul-mouthed chorus issuing thence, as would remind him, haply, of the demon-choruses in 'Faust.'

Soda, in his reckless state, was a fit member for such a gang, and he set himself at once to do honour to his high estate. The daily labour of 57 Party was light (which suited him), consisting generally of oakum-picking, for such a set of desperadoes could not be permitted the use of sharpened instruments. Yet twice he managed to evade the rule; not to kill himself or anybody else, he was too cunning for that; but merely from a laudable desire to do what was difficult, and so to obtain applause. On one occasion the searcher discovered in his pocket a remarkably neat stiletto, consisting of a piece of wood well-sharpened, set in a handle framed of twisted oakum. On another occasion he found a mop-nail five inches long. When taken from him he ground his teeth like a hyena, swearing that he would have the

blood of that officer some day. Indeed, he was vastly good at threats, for he knew full well that no amount of abuse or threatening could be taken to come within the category of 'assaults.'

With the Scripture-reader he had a great game, and nearly terrified that stout personage out of his senses ; for one day when the worthy gentleman arrived to read Jeremiah to him, he sidled up quite close with a hideous leer ; so close that his visitor felt his hot breath, and read unutterable things in the depths of his oyster eyes ; and, producing a boot-heel iron sharpened like a circular knife, went through a soul-harrowing and blood - curdling pantomime, suggestive of throat-cutting and subsequent decease, with lolling tongue and accompanying gurgles. Paralysed with fear, for he doubted not that his hour was come, the Scripture-reader remained motionless and fascinated, till Soda chose to let him go ; and though he was many days before recovering the shock, Mr. Virgin got off scot-free ; for the Scripture-reader could not conscientiously swear that his life had been in real danger, and the

convict declared loudly that his pantomime had pointed to suicide.

Old Scarraweg knew better. He was certain that this was only one of the grim jests for which Soda and his colleagues were famous, and waxed peevish anent the folly of attempting to exhort such miscreants. The only thing for it was to take a leaf out of the governor's book and *watch*, and keep the arch-scoundrel in the special gang, isolated as much as might be from the rest; and to see that in future thin shoes were served out to him, instead of boots with iron heels. This jumped well with his native indolence; so he sat quite content in his stall in the long shed, and screamed and yelled like an arch-fiend, and courted bread and water with persuasive arts; for did he not pant for the infirmary as the hart doth for the waterbrooks, with its cosy beds and congenial company, its codliver oil and absolute idleness?

But the Scripture-reader, if timid, was scrupulous and faithful, and truly anxious, according to his lights, to do his Master's work. His wage was but a pittance; he was as nervous as a woman; yet, like many a weak

woman, he was capable of heroic acts ; and, though too diffident to suspect such a thing, was gifted with the highest of all courage—that which knows it is afraid, yet battles bravely with fear. He could not conquer himself sufficiently to face Soda again alone, but neither would he abandon him altogether to his evil courses—not at least without one effort more. So, taking his courage in his two hands one morning, he trotted forth with his Bible under his arm and actually penetrated into the awful shed where the notorious twenty were sitting in a row under care of the single sentinel.

But he could make nothing of him. The moment his squat little figure appeared in the doorway, he was greeted with such hoots and ingenious expletives as brought beads of perspiration to his brow. His husky voice trembled with agitation as he mopped his hot face with a bandanna, and he felt like a timorous amateur tamer called, without previous rehearsals, to perform in a cage of lions, as he tripped quickly past the mouthing ruffians, who were jutting forth the tongue

at him and shouting derisive ditties about his Master.

He stopped and sat down beside George Virgin, encouraged by the presence of the warder, who was reflecting in the midst of the din on the low pay of prison officials. He earnestly exhorted the ex-doll's eye polisher to consider his latter end, whereat the bilious crumpet face of that individual wrinkled up, and the heavy eyelids were raised a little from the cruel eyes and dropped again, and the coarse lips parted in a grin, displaying a fang on either side.

‘Think of the new life,’ urged the little man. ‘No sinner is too degraded for the notice of the Lord. It is nought to Him that humanity should have set you outside its pale. But even on earth you are not quite lost. Albeit you have become a 57, there is hope for you, you know. The system deprives no man, however fallen, of hope. By behaving well for six months, you can be sent back to your old comrades, and this grievous escapade will be forgotten.’

‘I’m an old lag, and know how far to go,’ returned the other, sulkily. ‘Did you say a “new

life," master? Nobody more pleased than me to have a new life; this one ain't special lively. Jest you send me to the "farm;" there I'll be quiet enough; that's the new life I'm trying for. Sarsparella! three times a day' (singing). 'Go back to old comrades? Oh, Jehoshaphat! Blest if that ain't a good look out! Breaking stones in the quarry, slaving like a nigger and wearing myself to the bone, pulling up and down that blooming crane or hammering at bits of stone? No, thanks. I've had enough of that. The privilege of returning to hard labour? Oh, Susannah! you're an amoosin' cuss, you are!"

With that he banged his head three times with a shank of junk, beat his open mouth with his open palm three times to produce a sound like the drawing of a cork, executed a sitting breakdown, after the manner of a Christy Minstrel corner-man, and then squeaked like a pig in the agonies of death, which elegant imitation was immediately taken up by the occupants of all the stalls, till the worthy Scripture-reader was compelled to place his fingers in his ears and vanish. What was to be done with a man like that? Nothing,

simply nothing! If the governor were allowed more latitude in the use of the triangles, such men would be brought to order in no time. The fetid lees would remain at the bottom instead of surging to the surface; the innately vicious would assume a pretence at least of decorum; and, deprived of the exciting influence of bad example, the lesser lights of 57 Party would never blaze out at all.

So thought the stout little gentleman who had just been so grievously insulted; and in the softness of his nature he came with sorrow to the conclusion that he was not fitted for his post. He was in no sense a leader of men; and he who would reform the most abandoned class of his erring fellows must be a leader of men. Yet was he most ambitious of doing good. What cruel destiny had made of him a sower in sterile soil—iron-bound earth which needs an iron hand to plough it? In a low neighbourhood of London, for example, he might have done wonders: have read Jeremiah to poverty-stricken widows till they were Niobes—all tears; have droned at them till, subdued and crushed, they subsided, conscience-smitten,

into edifying fits ; have mildly lectured young artisans whose differences with 'the missus' had led them to the public-house ; have been a benevolent, pursy *deus ex machinâ* in many a humble household ! The zeal and earnestness were there ; but the knowledge of human nature was not. How inscrutably are round pegs placed into square holes ! The chaplain, for instance, who, hedged about with a pleasing barrier of fiction, never visited any one at all till he was sent for—(faithful follower in the footsteps of Christ !)—would have made a first-class country squire, a respectable M.P., even a passable duke ; for he was well-informed, well dressed, white-handed, of polished manners ; but as a chaplain he was scarcely a success. Yet from his own point of view he was logically right. Clearly it was better and more fair to all, since the axiom was established that he could not satisfactorily admonish one thousand prisoners within a year, to admonish none at all. His digestion gained by the arrangement ; so did his pocket, for in his gentlemanly leisure he was able to write learned articles for the reviews, and erudite criticisms upon books ;

and I even doubt whether the prisoners suffered much by the arrangement.

The very sight of the smug, well-dressed gentleman, with well-trimmed nails and suave aristocratic manners, and lips which, whilst they seemed to be saying 'prunes,' were dropping platitudes even more mawkish, was in itself an insult to souls in travail. What could he know of all they suffered, of where the shoe galled them most, of what their temptations had been, of what yearnings racked them; or how could he gauge with that sleek finger of his the depth of their inner agony? No! It was well that he held aloof, and permitted his duties to be performed in mole-like fashion by his pousy little deputy. Peradventure, had he said 'prunes' to the morose ones, such as myself and others, we might in the throes of exasperation have even defied the CAT, and have been condemned to don the black dress in consequence.

The little man was trotting across the yard, with rueful thoughts disturbing his pure mind as to whether anything could possibly be done to save Soda from perdition, when

he came face to face with the chief warder. The pair respected each other, and were firm friends, though their discussions—more frequently than not—ended in an agreement to disagree. The Scripture-reader being good company enough for Crusoes in the wilds of Dartmoor, and being, moreover, neither flesh nor fowl, often played billiards of an evening in the warder's recreation-room, without being considered to demean himself; or read aloud (not Jeremiah) to an assembled audience of prison-officers; was even once known (this, however, must be breathed in whispers) to dress himself up in a gown and night-cap, at Christmas-tide, and enact the part of Mrs. Bouncer in time-honoured 'Box and Cox.'

'Where do you come from?' asked old Scarraweg. 'Oh, 57 Shed—mere waste of time—they'll hit you on the nose some day, old gent, and I'm not sure I shan't have a sneaking fellow-feeling. I can't say that I find Jeremiah comforting myself. What did you go for? Soda? Ah!' (this with a tinge of artistic appreciation) 'he is an out-and-outer, Soda is—and no mistake. Shouldn't be sur-

prised if he came to the gallows, yet. He did, as near as a toucher, for that policeman on the Moor! As bad and abandoned a man as there is on the establishment.'

'They're not scarce,' sighed the Scripture-reader. 'There are many enough in apprenticeship here for the black or yellow jacket! yet some, thank God, are truly penitent.'

Now this happened to be one of the topics upon which the two agreed to differ. The chief warder had much ado to keep his irascible temper from invasion by tantrums, when the Reverend Aurelius was held up as an example; did he not know Tilgoe well; and he was scarcely less annoyed when I, 'Ebenezer Anderson,' was pilloried as a reprobate of the first-class. As he was fond of saying of himself, 'he could see a light-house through a fog as well as most;' and was the only one of the officials who had not misread me. After that he had shook off his first suspicion of me as a gentleman lag, I had received from him many secret acts of kindness. True, I was always in trouble. Reported for acts of insubordination; constantly being condemned to punishment; but (and this I of

course discovered later) it did not escape him that the acts were trivial acts, resulting from a fretted brain ; that I did my work well, although I was continually losing marks for deeds of folly, and that I had never justified my reputation of being really dangerous. ‘Depend upon it,’ he had often said to his cronies, the innkeeper of the ‘Duchy’ hard by, and the owner of the one shop where you could buy anything ; ‘depend upon it, that man’s made what he is by circumstances. He hasn’t a bad figurehead, though his expression’s mortal queer ; and I should know a bad face—haven’t I seen enough ? It’s a gloomy and downcast face, with lowering eyes with ne’er a light in ’em ; a dusky, colourless face, like the sea before a thunderstorm ; but it’s not a wicked one. If he was badly treated—as he would have been on the hulks long ago—I grant you that he might turn real bad ; for there’s a violent temper there, kept in check by a strong will. When the guv’ner bullyrags him, I’ve seen his lip quiver, shipmet, and have had to rap his knuckles to keep his fingers quiet. But, though vexing enough often, he’s never real exasperating ; and, if I

had my way, I'm pretty sure I could pull him round.'

'You could?' asked the unbelieving Bouncer. 'How, pray?'

'I'd do what he's asked so often, and lock him up alone; and I'd send you in to talk in a free-and-easy way; and I'd cut Jeremiah out of your Bible. He's no business in a prison Bible, where the men have quite enough to make 'em miserable as it is. I'm beginning to have just a wee misgivin' about him now, I confess, for he's palling on too much with the blackguards of his party, which is bad. Not that it matters to him, poor devil; for if he's never out of trouble, he'll never get out of here—worse luck.'

Then, casually, in a desultory way, the Scripture-reader returned to the subject of Soda, and repeating his words as nearly verbatim as might be, set the chief-warder thinking.

'Oh!' he murmured, his abstracted eyes quite darkened by shaggy brows; 'fetch the farm—go into hospital, eh? That he shan't, I swear. The privilege of hard labour. We've had enough of his pranks. He shall

go back to the quarry next week. I'll speak to the governor before I'm a day older. Hang the eccentric cattle! Some of 'em actually like what we'd have 'em look upon as the heaviest of punishment!

And so it came about, to the amazement and consternation of Soda, before he had enjoyed his '*otium cum oakum*' for a fortnight! He was actually told off one morning, by the unfeeling Scarraweg, to the familiar but hated party, despite his evil acts, and set to work in the cold blast—still in chains—with an objectionable pickaxe, on a rock, instead of at a hank of twist in a warm shed.

But he was not to be so easily beaten. Taken by surprise at first, he made a scratch or two, then, with a curse, flung down the pickaxe, and sent it spinning like a quoit on the smooth stone.

'You do your damndest,' he hissed between his teeth; 'but you'll never get another ha'porth out of me!' Then, turning fiercely round on his late myrmidon, who, pale of aspect, trembled hard-by, clad also in the orange garb and irons: 'You Miffy!' he cried, with sudden frenzy. 'You shivering,

shaking hound ! If I did what I ought, I'd smash your head—you craven, blunderin' cur ! And some day I shall.'

The unhappy postmaster shrank terrified beyond his reach, and both I and Spevins stood instinctively in front of him, as the infuriated bully aimed a blow at his too obedient slave.

'Oh, that's your game !' he said, calming down all at once, as, shrugging his shoulders, he crossed his arms. 'All right. To-morrow or next day'll do as well ; but I owe him one, and I like to pay my debts. Why ?' he went on, grinding out his words with ominous rage. 'Becos', but for his being such a fool, I should 'a bin free ; becos', when he was in the kitchen, he used to give us short allowance' (he seemed to forget that when he himself was in the kitchen, he used to lap up the soup of others without a qualm) ; 'and becos' I hate the puling idiot. That's enough !'

The warder on duty, perceiving a yellow man unduly excited, summoned up several of the civil guard, and sternly bade him do his work. But he would not. On that point he was firm, repeating constantly, whilst his

guardians were handcuffing his wrists together behind his back :

‘ You can do your damnedest, one and all of ye. Not a ha’porth will I do ; not a ha’porth !’

This was a bad beginning. Handcuffed thus, he remained all the morning—silent, slouching, with his two fangs glittering, his lower jaw protruded, and with the expression of an underbred bulldog who has over-eaten himself. With the dirty, blue-striped over-smock flung awry on his round shoulders, the one yellow knickerbocker, which told its tale, the handcuffs and leg-irons, the cropped bullet-poll and bristly, unshorn chin, it would have been difficult to hit on a more repulsive figure than Soda presented as he stood, hour after hour, sulky and motionless. Our dapper governor seemed to think so (accustomed though he was to such pictures), as he was received on his rounds by the warder in charge, who sang out with the accustomed salute :

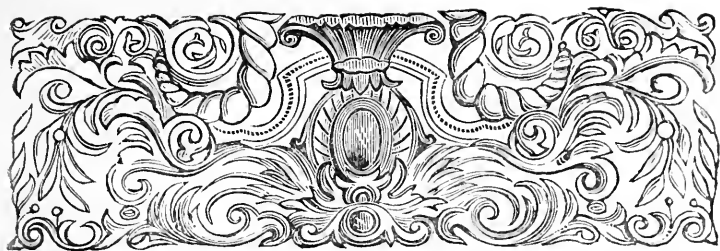
‘ Twenty-three Party ! Eighteen, all correct. One casual !’

‘ One casual,’ grunted the governor. ‘ Oh !

It's you, is it, again? Which is strongest, you or I? We shall see; we shall see. Take off the handcuffs at dinner-time,' he proceeded; 'then replace them, and take care that he doesn't treat you as he did that policeman. The rascal! Oh, indeed! You want to fetch the farm, do you? You think you will? I don't quite think it—no, not quite.' Then he strutted off, half smothered as he chuckled over his joke, and presently we all fell in and marched back to the prison for dinner.


Dinner over, the warder who came to replace the handcuffs started in alarm and summoned help.

The ruffian, with the rat-like instinct which stood with him for courage, had torn the skin of either leg with his dinner-knife, about the place where the leg-iron would tap in walking. There was no help for it. He had won the skirmish. For two or three days he must be put to bed in hospital. But when the scratch was healed—then——!



CHAPTER XVIII.

MIFFY'S CHAMPION.

ODA won the first skirmish of the campaign (or, as Jaggs would have put it, 'scored one'), and bade fair to win the second. His wound refused to heal, in spite of rags and ointments; and his enemies perceived with dismay that strong measures must be taken, or he would 'fetch the farm' for good. Mr. Scarraweg was as indignant as the governor, for the honour of the cloth forbade that a convict's cunning should baffle the vigilance of his keepers. What were they to do? The doctor (a new-comer, a medical student, a mere youth, half shy, half insolent), suggested that a nurse should watch the patient and soothe him into good behaviour; or that a warder should sit

over him night and day. The astute Scarraweg suggested, as less trouble and of more effect, a straight-waistcoat, and the brilliant measure was unanimously carried. Fancy the brawny, shuffling scamp—he who recently, so certain of himself, had been flinging insults at his Maker—who in jovial company had been reviling, with foulest tongue, all that was good upon the earth—who had been snapping his fingers at the authorities set over him—lying prone, in solitude, in a canvas bag tied tightly round the neck, with two sleeves knotted securely behind the back !

Now on the upper floor of the infirmary is a padded room, secluded within double doors, so that as few sounds from without as possible may penetrate. In that room the incorrigible culprit was confined—unable to move, unable to touch his leg with so much as a finger-tip. When the chief-warder announced to the now dismal ruffian that he need not be afraid, for that the chief nurse would attend to his wants till his leg healed, he laughed a loud guffaw as he retired, for one Tilgoe—erst a priest—held the office of hospital-orderly, and, baffled

himself, he had grown so exceedingly spiteful, that Scarraweg was not beset with fears lest the patient should be made too comfortable. No. Mr. Soda should not win the second skirmish. He should not be permitted to score two, if the chief warder knew it! And he, the chief warder, was right in his calculations, for Tilgoe, visiting his new patient presently, looked down with a bitter sneer, and said, with an abruptness in which was no compassion :

‘ Well, fool, you look pretty, don’t you ?’ Then he drew a chair to the bedside, and, with a pen-feather delicately pointed, amused himself by tickling the patient’s nose till he fairly bellowed for mercy. But the parson was not merciful. He titillated the nasal bulb till it quivered ; then tweaked it severely ; and then tickled it again. Had not his own misfortunes sprung from this arrogant donkey’s asinine attempt to escape ? But for that idiotic affair he himself would not have been beguiled into building false hopes of pardon—have been precipitate in his tyranny over the peach-faced one—have come to unmitigated grief. Here was the

primary cause of all the trouble lying helpless under his hand, in a canvas bag. Was it likely that one of his kind would let such an opportunity go by? No. Unhappy George Virgin! Never—if, indeed, his probable condition in another state ever occurred to him at all—had he dreamed of such torments by-and-by, of such tribulation in the future as was his in the fell present.

The hospital-orderly, carefully shutting the doors lest importunate persons should disturb his recreation, placed pieces of sugar on the pillow to attract the flies; then sat and watched them buzzing on the crumpet-face. Vainly did Soda twitch his short bulbous nose, vainly did he make snaps at the insects in his anguish; every groan provoked an answering chuckle from the male Magdalen, who, one blue-and-red stocking crossed over his knee, poised his two elbows on it, and supported his chin in his two hands.

‘You dolt! you donkey! you jackass! you trebly-distilled savage baboon! you blithering idiot! Why were you such a fool?’ he kept murmuring at intervals. ‘Why such a fool, eh? Why such a fool?’

Soda, his Dutch courage waning rapidly, begged with comical humility to be told what he had done.

‘You allers liked poor Soda, you did,’ he whined. ‘You and I was allers friends. Didn’t you use to give me baccy many a time, that I might clean your tins, and didn’t I do ’em first-class?’

‘No, you didn’t,’ bluntly retorted the other. ‘You made Miffy do ’em, and gave him no tobacco for the job. But that’s not what I mean—not what I mean.’ And then, to the increasing dread and mortification of the first speaker, Tilgoe, crouched in a heap like a toad of mustard hue, sat staring at him and swinging to and fro, till it broke upon Soda all of a sudden, as he marked the glittering venom in his looks, that the wits of his former comrade were deranged. Then feeling how helpless he was with his arms tied to his side, his natural cowardice took possession of him. He roared at the top of his voice for help. In vain. Was not every official in the prison familiar with his roaring, either in the form of ribald song or of mere aggressive noise?

‘There’s that bad un at it again,’ was all

that one warder remarked to another with a snigger, as they passed under the infirmary wall and went their way. The hospital-orderly knew this well enough, and never blenched for all the roaring, till, growing surfeited with it, he put a threatening fist within an inch of his victim's eye, and said with calmness :

‘Just hold your accursed row, d’ye hear, or it will be the worse for you.’

By-and-by he went away, and came back with the patient's dinner. ‘Now at least,’ thought Soda, ‘I shall get my arms free ;’ but he reckoned without Scarraweg. Twice, when freed from handcuffs for a moment, he had done damage. Special orders had been given that the patient was to be fed with a spoon ; and spoon-fed he was, though not precisely as intended ; for the diabolical head-nurse placed the spoon almost to his lips, then withdrew it with a jerk which spilled some of its contents upon his flat crumpet visage, from which he was unable to remove it.

When Scarraweg entered the room late in the evening, and turned his bull's-eye full on

him, he found his obstinacy broken ; he was sobbing alone in the darkness, with greasy tears dripping from the corner of each half-closed lid upon the pillow. The chief-warder's expectations from the head-nurse were justified. Canny old sea-dog ! How furious Tilgoe would have been had he known that, by giving vent to his inherent malice upon one who could not defend himself, he was playing into the hands of his enemy ! Nothing could have been more neatly done—more summarily, more completely. The beast was tamed—was abject, grovelling, fawning—was brought to bay and vanquished.

‘ Ah !’ growled Scarraweg. ‘ So you won’t do any work, you great porpoise-faced swab, won’t you ? What a pity ! You’ll fetch the farm, will you ? Well, ain’t we considerate ? You’re not doing any work, and you are in hospital, where you wished to be ; so I hope you’re pleased. What say ? Go along, you ungrateful swine ! You didn’t know we kept rooms here for single lodgers—would like to be in a ward with the rest ? There’s no pleasin’ some people, ’pon my conscience.’

Here the pock-marked visage of 57 looked so wobegone, that the Newgate frill of the chief-warder expanded like fins, and, laying down his lantern, he gave vent to one of those loud haw-haws which sounded unnatural in that place ; breezy, of the sea.

Then, amid the gurgles of his grief, did Soda pour out his sorrows and complaints, to which his listener hearkened with lowering brow and hardening mouth.

‘ Oh ! ’ he said suddenly ; ‘ then you’ve not had enough yet ? You revenge yourself by telling a pack of lies of the head-nurse. Do you suppose that if he had not proved his reformation by good conduct, he would have been promoted by the governor to this position ? You tell him all that, and see how much he’ll believe of it. Very well. Good-night. That leg of yours takes a long time to heal. Till it does, you stop here ; that’s flat. Good-night, and learn to keep a civil tongue between your teeth, and don’t make lying complaints of the excellent head-nurse.’

So Scarraweg went away ; and on the morrow, keeping him still in his strait-waistcoat, gave him another dose of the tor-

mentor, till the abject wretch (upon whose cuticle no treatment save this, or else the lash, would have had the least effect) seemed prostrated to the flatness of a door-mat, and whined and whimpered like a baby.

He was cowed for the time being certainly, but by no means tamed. So soon as his leg was well (which it soon was when he was prevented from touching it), he returned to the gang and sullenly did his work—as little as he dared, that is to say, as in the old days—but the look of the underbred bulldog remained on his repulsive countenance, and now and again he glanced with furtive eyes from under his swollen lids, in the direction of the other yellow jacket, with a stealthy expression which boded its wearer no good.

I observed it, and so did Jaggs, and set myself to conjecture what was passing in his mind. The thoughts of such men as he move in a tortuous fashion which it is difficult to follow, and beget unexpected results. Inconsequent ideas worm themselves into their heads ; and finding ample room, take up their permanent residence there. By some peculiar reasoning of his own, he had arrived at the

conclusion that the failure of the great attempt was in some sort Miffy's fault, and cried out for vengeance. As before he had been used to bully Miffy with uncouth kicks and pinches, which was his way of showing good-humour to one who was not strong enough to resist; so now, abandoning all notions of good-humour, he set himself to do his wretched slave some grievous harm. At present, opportunity lacked; so soon as a chance presented itself, I had small doubt that he would seize it.

The return of the fugitive to our party threw a strong shadow of foreboding over me as well as over Miffy. That miserable, hollow-cheeked creature trembled and shook like the silver aspen when the sinister glance of his lord was upon him. Was this a subtle form of the occult wave which we call animal magnetism, an influence of which as yet we know so little? How odd that Soda should all at once take so violent an aversion to his catspaw! Far from rendering, by blunders of his own, the attempted escape abortive, it was quite the other way. But for the diversion caused by the postmaster's groans

and struggles, attention would have been fixed on his companion, and he would never have escaped at all. He had conceived a hate for his half-witted victim, "probably on the principle that we dislike the people we have injured ; and as it increased by feeding on itself, so also did Miffy's terror.

As regards myself, the effect his presence produced was curious. For a long while the gay gabble of Jaggs and Spevins had been in my ear as tinkling sheepbells. It had nought to do with me—was in another field—on another property, a long way off. Yet it was not unpleasant to one situated as I was, who was pleased to consider himself out of reach of any more of Fortune's arrows. Then came Spevins's scheme, with the new idea it presented to me, of some day perhaps doffing the felon's dress; and with it the after-resolve that that could or should never be. And then came Soda back again—the incarnate image of the lowest, vulgarest, most common type of felon—worse than he used to be by reason of the new bulldog aspect ; and I began to feel indignant, as I used to do, in that I was forced to consort with such as he.

Under his auspices the quarry became unendurable. There were many men working there who had been brought to poll-cropping by reason of their tempers. These Soda delighted to set by the ears, by here a wink, and there a word, craftily managing to keep out of the *bagarre* himself; so that there was a constant under-current of anger and suspicion and mutual ill-feeling, which chafed us all, and lashed and fomented the bad element within us. Even the lively Spevins felt this, and became low and moody.

‘I can’t abear that cove,’ he said, sighing at times. ‘Quarrying ain’t so jolly as goin’ to the Derby, by long chalks; but we used to do what we couldn’t help without too much grumblin’ afore he came back. He’s a real bad lot!’ he would declare fretfully, regarding the bulldog with an eye closed, as a connoisseur surveys a picture—‘a disgrace to our profession. What’s the good of all that scowling and muttering, I’d like to know? We puts into a lottery, where there are prizes and blanks. Well, I draws a blank—worse luck for me!—so all I can do’s to make the best of it. It’s like the glass

bottles stuck along the wall-tops—as I've often thought whilst getting over into a gent's back garden. You put a foot within my boundary, says the bit of glass-bottle, and I'll tear your clothes. Do so, my hearty, if you can, I says; I must make it my business to circumvent you. Well, you see, after a good many years—more shame to me for bein' so awkward!—the glass-bottle did cut me; but if ever it does again, may I be strung up straight off! After what I've learnt since I've bin in here, I give the coppers leave to try their best! He's got summat a workin' in his inside this minute, that bad un has—I'd like to know what it is! As for that Miffy there, it's a sin and a shame to keep him on this work. He's half loony now with fear of that vagabond, and consumptive too. If they don't look out, he'll be worrying of 'em for an inquest.'

Months dragged on in this fashion, and we were in midwinter again. When for weeks and weeks the cold fogs lay upon the earth we were kept close, according to precedent established, and enjoyed the warmth of the great stoves, which glowed with ruddy heat. At such

times—indeed, at most times—it was more cheerful inside the prison walls than without, for there at least there was constant movement, constant busy marching hither and thither, a continual pattering of feet. Without, when the fog swirled away, hunted by howling winds, the spectacle was dismal to behold—the more dismal the more clear the atmosphere—for the great expanse lay dead, as trackless as colourless. Beyond our tiny encampment no chimney sent its column heavenward, telling its silent tale of warmth and life. Sometimes we were snowed up for days together, all communication being cut off by reason of the snowdrifts, which lay twenty feet deep in the gulleys; and then the ukase would go forth for a grand cleaning-up of what was as bright as could be already. Then, too, would our clothing be passed under survey with a maternal care which, in consequence of its exactness, angered Spevins; and we would be ordered to the bath for an extra wash, and spend spare minutes in clipping each other's polls.

I did revel in the extra bath, and saw

things sometimes there which set me thinking. But my song, as I thought of what I saw, had always the same refrain, 'How singular is this convict world of which I have become a part !' The mania for tattooing among the felon class is amazing when you come to think of it. One would imagine that men who have particular reasons for concealing their identity, would be careful not to add to the means whereby they may be recognised by the police. A mole, a scar, a malformation goes down in the 'Black Register,' and may be used as a clue some day. This can't be helped, of course ; but why facilitate the task of identification ? Sailors are supposed to be specially addicted to tattooing ; but labourers and others, who swell the majority of the penal class, beat the salts out of the field. Six men out of ten at Dartmoor were all over tattoo-marks. Most had their initials imprinted somewhere ; many, their names in full, and their addresses—some, even, had a complete list of all their aliases ! Some, again, were adorned with the names of their lady-loves, accompanied by appropriate mottoes artistically wrought

in blue and red. One labourer, who, if I remember right, was often in for felony, was a lady-killer ; for he had no less than twenty-two initials engraven on his skin, besides his own, with a culminating glory in the shape of a sentiment, which informed those who had the honour of seeing it, that ‘Jane Saunders was his only love, and that he honoured the heart which could feel for another.’

In idle talk I remarked upon this one day to Jaggs, observing how impossible it would be for that man who, as an habitual criminal, was duly enrolled in the Black Register, ever to conceal his identity ; to which Jaggs replied, that this was an argument in favour of a pet theory, which went to show how stupid a creature the ordinary convict is. I could not agree with him there, however, for it is notorious how fertile of resource is the felon instinct. I could only presume that the governor might in the main be right ; that the habitual criminal-class is a race apart, with different ways of thought, different desires, different feelings, just as it has different aims and ambitions to the other

classes amongst whom it moves, against whom it is ever at war.

Spevins, for instance, had nothing in common with the ways of what we are pleased to dub 'respectable society.' He was warm-hearted, generous, gifted with a quaint humour; but there the bond of similarity came to an end. How he made me laugh with his morbid horror of doing things in order! When the fogs came down, and the bog-parties and quarry-parties were told off to polish the brasswork, the stair-cases, the iron cell-partitions, Spevins for an hour or two would be delighted. It was something new, and made him feel like a sailor on board ship; and the force of imagination caused him for the time being to forget that he was a captive—the slave of bells and dingdongs.

One day whilst he and I were rubbing windows in one of the halls, we were startled by a sound of altercation in a cell close by. Going thither we found Miffy and Soda—the former quivering at the extreme end, the latter with his evillest look in his wicked eyes.

‘What are you doing to him?’ Spevins asked, with suspicion. ‘If the warder found you here, you’d catch it!’

‘Should I?’ returned the other, sulkily. ‘I’m scrubbing the ironwork, and doin’ as I’m told, and minding my own business, that’s what I’m doin’.’

‘No, he’s not!’ cried Miffy, his worn face more pale than usual with excitement. ‘This is my cell, and I found him poking about among my books. What were you looking for among my books? What do you want, Soda? Oh! Do leave me alone! Haven’t I suffered enough through you already?’ and the poor fellow, with hands clasped above his head, sank, moaning, down into the corner.

Hearing the warder approaching, we decamped; but Spevins was unusually thoughtful all through that day, and said abruptly at last, glancing up at me:

‘He means mischief. He’ll worry that wretched creature into his grave. Isn’t it hard that we can’t prevent it?’

‘The word of a convict goes for nothing!’ I responded, bitterly. ‘The governor wouldn’t

listen for a moment. I think I'll speak to the Scripture-reader.'

I did not find a chance, however, of speaking to him for a day or two ; but, as it happened, he had observed the peculiar mental state of his *protégé*, and had been much exercised to know what to make of it. The man was like one in a fever. Outdoor labour was clearly too much for him ; the rarified atmosphere, combined with excess of moisture, was making havoc of his health. It would never do for him to sink just as his time was nearly up. That would be too bad. He must be kept indoors again, as he used to be before that outrageously silly escapade of his. Meanwhile the talisman must be judiciously applied. Dear, dear, if the governor only came to know how much his hybrid employé was taking on himself ! What a pothor there would be, and what a trouncing he would get ! But the governor mustn't know. To be sure, how should he know ? For Scripture-readers do not belong to that special breed which require constant reconnoitring through peepholes. He would trudge across to Tavistock on private business, and it would

be very curious indeed if he did not find a missive for Miffy lying at the post-office.

So the worthy gentleman took advantage of the first promising day, and trotted cheerily along over the frozen roads, meditating as he went upon his own clever acts. He was becoming quite a trafficker ! going and coming on the sly for the behoof of prisoners. He would be passing in tobacco next, wicked old man ! Never mind, surely it is right sometimes to do evil that good may come. The rule was too hard and fast an one which forbade convicts from receiving letters, except at rigorously fixed times and seasons. It behoves humanity to break such rules. The wretched postmaster did prize those scraps of paper so. The effect they had on him was marvellous. How fond he must be of his wife and children ! Soon, please God, they would be reunited—very soon. He had learnt a lesson during his first term which would keep him straight for the future ; his friends would look after him, and see that he respected other people's stamps. Certainly his wits must, at all hazards, be kept straight

during the brief period at the end of which was liberty.

The morning was so fine that we were set to our usual avocations in the quarry ; but before dinner-hour the wind rose, a dense curtain seemed to be drawn like a pall across the heavens, and presently the air was thick with driving snow and sleet. We were marched in at once, and remained in ; and the chief warder rated us with unaccustomed harshness, which showed that he had something on his mind. He fussed about, craning his weatherbeaten face out of doorways and round corners, and withdrawing it again, wet and rubicund, with a shake and a growl. He glanced from time to time at his watch, and as the storm showed no signs of abating, strode off to the governor's room, where for some time he remained closeted. It leaked out by-and-by—the way things leak out in prison is most astonishing ! prisoners know somehow what passes in spite of all precautions—it leaked out that the Scripture-reader had gone off alone to Tavistock, in spite of the drifts, trusting to the beaten track and his knowledge and the ground. We were aware that such a

storm as was then raging must obliterate all tracks, that the big stones set up at distances were or would soon be covered there ; would remain nothing but the telegraph-poles standing out on the drear waste ; if the old man could keep that line in view he might do well enough ; if by ill-luck he lost it—ah ! well, we are in the hands of God. When He wills that we shall go, sure no strategy of ours may prevent the flitting !

How trite a remark is this, and yet I let it stand, and here is another one to keep it company. By how happily irresistible an impulse do we look on the good side of those we shall never see again. It is a comforting thought that it should be so, for it shows that our good angel never really flies away to heaven ; he grows bored with us, maybe ; sleeps unhealthily as one may do who is compelled to batten upon diet that is indigestible ; but there he is nodding at our elbow, for all the garbage whereon he's fed, and when we give him an unconscious nudge he opens half an eye for a second and grumbles something which perchance may prove the saving of us after all. You, no doubt, are weary by this

time of the lengthy catalogue of wickedness which I have been compiling for you. Sheep that are always straying are apt to be vexing to the sight. We wish that one or another would turn in the right direction if only for variety, just as Spevins longed to fold his blankets cornerwise, and to fling his brush and platter upon the floor instead of on the shelf.

Well, here is a trifling instance of the sheep moving in the right direction, which may prove refreshing. Many of the felons had gibed and jeered at the pursy little Scripture-reader, had mimicked his odd ways and turned-up toes, and had used, on purpose to grieve him, abominable language to his face. But there were few amongst them who were not saddened for a moment at the prospect of his being whirled from them by a snow-wreath ; albeit they knew not on what errand of mercy he had gone.

As for myself a presentiment whispered to me that he would be lost ; for Miffy seemed doomed to be without a friend. He was too kind to helpless Miffy ; Miffy and I were equally singled out by Fate as targets for

cruel arrows. There was something parallel in our cases which had always kept a drop of sympathy alive for Miffy, when the rest had dripped away. I did not know that he was gone on Miffy's errand. I only knew that I intended to embrace the first opportunity to beg him to intercede for the postmaster, and that such an opportunity was never likely now to arise.

That storm was one of the very worst that had been seen for years even on barren Dartmoor. It was evening before it abated ; then the wind dropped with as little warning as it had arisen, and the moon shone out on a vast even sheet of whiteness. Mr. Scarraweg, guaging this phase of our treacherous climate with puckered lips and head well on one side, as sailors do, decided that the night would be fine ; and having reported as much to the governor, a party of volunteers was organised to go in search of their missing friend. There were ropes and poles and preparations as though the expedition were going up Mount Blanc. After all, the venture was not so much less dangerous. The bogs were unsafe enough at the best of times ; masked

by a crust of varying thickness, the surface was but a series of mantraps. Prince Town in midwinter might be a colony away in the far West. True, there were no hostile Indians, with too ready bow and scalping-knife ; but there was iron-bound, uncompromising Solitude, dug about with the pitfalls of destruction.

We of course knew nothing of the departure of the expedition, save what one member of the night patrol said in passing to another ; for, as usual, we were under lock and key in our separate dens by eight o'clock, under strict orders to go to sleep. But when we rose in the morning we found discipline relaxed ; the party had not returned ; both the governor and chief warder had gone with it ; what if it too should have met disaster ? The attention of the officials was fixed upon this dread possibility. Spevins breathed again, for no bells or gongs were sounded at the usual hours ; no hateful guardian sent him down upon all fours to clean his cell exactly at a given second. The breakfast-barrows even were fully half an hour late in arriving from the kitchens, and Spevins rejoiced in the

unpunctuality, even though the brisk air had given him an appetite.

We were standing in the yard in rows, waiting to be rubbed down before proceeding to labour, when the great iron gates swung open and the long expected *cortége* wound slowly in. First came the governor, brisk and jaunty (nothing on earth could have made him otherwise), looking more truculent than ever, because his cheeks and nose were blue, while his moustache was frozen stiff. After him a motley host—warders off duty and civil guards—their clothes bedabbled with dirt, their shoulders and hair bleached with rime. I remembered having seen just such an expedition once at Chamounix, and the sudden picture of old days, when I was a *man*, sent a thrill through my breast. It was an expedition in search of a guide who had been lost, during my honeymoon, when my life dawned so golden and so fair. What recollections were these! Should I never forget the past? Then came old Scarraweg sobbing quietly, the salt tears running down his furrowed face into his Newgate frill; and behind him the cause of his trouble, borne on

the shoulders of six men. What an awe-inspiring spectacle it was ! The little Scripture-reader knelt erect upon a hurdle, with his silver head bowed and hands clasped before his face, for all the world like some image borne in procession on the occasion of a Spanish festival.

He was not ridiculous now, for it was thus that he had met his Maker. There was something solemn in his attitude, which struck us as it had struck his friends when they found him frozen thus. It seems that when he became conscious of having lost his way, and learnt that his fate was sealed, he had sunk down in prayer, and that the snow had swirled round and round him in guise of winding-sheet, maintaining him upright as he knelt.

So Miffy was deprived of his ally just when he needed him most, and, left a prey to his own weakness, gave himself up to black despondency, the only light spot in which was his one creased and ragged letter.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE CRISIS ARRIVES.



S you may well imagine, the tragic event just narrated was conversational pabulum for us for many a day. The melancholy *cortége*, with its weirdly rigid freight, had passed before our eyes. We went about our work with downcast faces, each man thinking of the spectacle which had caused old Scarraweg to weep. For my part, it turned my thoughts again into the old channel, from which the discourse of Spevins had for a while diverted them. How I had prayed for death, in any form, however terrible, in vain. And here was the boon given to this man whose life was not a burthen to him. He had been

sent to his rest by the gentlest of all methods; for those who are frozen sink into a charmed slumber from which they awake——

Where? I could not help enlarging upon this in a half-dreamy way while at labour, but neither of my comrades agreed with my views. Jaggs, his hands tied up in dirty bits of linen, made a show of supporting a barrow while I filled it with fragments of granite, and observed that though the world had treated him scurvily enough, he had no desire to try another at present. Like Spevins, he was a fatalist, and looked forward now with eagerness to the day—visible as a dim speck—when the two would sally forth with increased wisdom to recommence their depredations. For Spevins had taken Jaggs in hand as he had tried to take me, and had found in him a less perverse disciple. He had pointed out that the art was not to be trusted which could so easily betray its votaries. What was the good of consummate skill in the manipulation of a little pea, if the manipulator was for ever tumbling into jail? The burglar had the artist on the hip, for he could not deny that he was

in the habit of returning to prison with a celerity which was quite remarkable.

‘I’m such a babe!’ he would murmur, in plaintive deprecation. ‘So unfit to take care of myself. The art is all right, and my fingers will be right some day; but the best artists are often careless as regards the world’s concerns; it’s my innocence; I’m so easily taken in.’

I could not help thinking, as I remarked the infantine expression steal over the lantern jaws, that I had seldom looked on a face so old and haggard. If there were childhood about this man, it savoured in appearance, at least, more of the second than the first.

Then Spevins, having lured him gently round from a show of lofty patronage to an admission of worldly helplessness, clinched the matter and arranged a partnership, whereby, when they went out, they were to be like twins, working together as a firm. I was not so easy to manage by any means, and he made little visible progress with me, for in the old, old days I had always been obstinate. I prated in a wearying manner, now of death, now of a long life’s entombment, clearly

demonstrating, to my own satisfaction, that I was the most unlucky man on earth, and that it was of no consequence what happened to me. Now and again I soared into realms of rhetoric which were quite incomprehensible to Spevins. On these occasions he sighed and declared that I was a fool for my pains not to take sensible advice ; but that what was to be, would be, somehow or another ; and that it was as hopeless to try to set pig-headed people right, as to bury a beefsteak underground in the expectation that it would grow into a bullock. Although we could not come to terms as to whether my life was irrevocably finished, he agreed with me and shared my indignation at the ill-treatment which the defenceless Miffy received at the hands of Soda ; an ill-treatment of a negative order for the present, consisting of a sword hung over his head by the thinnest of wires, which threatened each instant to give way.

The general conduct of Soda remained neutrally good. He was sullen and idle, of course, and made mischief between mates when it was possible. But the mere sight

of Scarraweg produced a scare which showed that his glimpse of purgatory in a straight-waistcoat would be long ere it was quite forgotten. Then, when that gentleman moved out of sight, the bulldog-look would reappear, and he would revenge himself for that dreadful time, if Miffy happened to be nigh, by a furtive punch in a tender place, or a brutal kick upon the shins.

He made overtures to the warder in charge on the subject of tobacco; but Scarraweg, with the example before him of the peach-faced one, had picked his man, and he was incorruptible. On the other hand, I had espied Soda, more than once, chattering with one of the guardians of his hall, and I marvelled now, as I had marvelled long ago, how he, if he did succeed in cajoling his gaoler, could manage to get him paid.

Early in the ensuing summer, when the moor was a carpet of flowers, I found myself, much to my disgust, transferred from the upper corner of the quarry, where I had become accustomed to work with Jaggs and Spevins, down to the centre where the great crane stands with which the blocks are lifted

into carts. It was not the working of the crane that I objected to, but having to be in proximity to Mr. George Virgin, whose duty it was, in company with another, to turn the wheel which raises the ponderous chain. My dislike to that bully had been turned by recent events into positive loathing. My gorge rose at him ; for there was a something underlying his crumpet mask of humanity which horribly recalled the chimpanzee. I was prepared to consort with *men*, however degraded ; but the idea of communion with this monstrous caricature of man, set all my teeth on edge. He was an unclean, loathsome quadruped sailing under false colours. His great hairy, leg-of-mutton fist was enough to turn the blood cold, so like was it to the paw of a gorilla. I resolved to ask the chief-warder what I had done to deserve this augmentation of my pain, and almost felt inclined to behave myself, rather than put up with so terrible a *corvée*. And then I smiled, as I thought of Spevin's convictions : 'What was to be, would be, somehow or another.' It is curious to reflect upon the manner in which people drift, and the odd,

unlikely creeks they drift into. Were the burglar's discourses not thrown away? Had the seed which he scattered upon the ground, been swallowed? Though it still presented to the eye that cannot see, a vacant, barren square of brown, was it quick, all the while, with bursting verdure? Verdure, forsooth! Much verdure was there about me, or likelihood of vernal promise, till, sinking under the sod, I should peep out again as grass! As usual I was building foolish houses of cards, which a breath would overthrow. Rugged old Scarraweg, pupil of Boreas, was a connoisseur in hurricanes, and upset with promptitude my little heap so soon as I showed it to him.

‘What you’ve done?’ he growled. ‘Ain’t you always doing summut? Don’t the gov’nor distrust you, and don’t your behaviour justify his distrust? Don’t pay out no more words—acts is what we want here. If you turn over a new leaf, your complaints ’ll be attended to. If not, they won’t.’

Then, seeing my disappointment, and unwilling to wound me too much, he said he

would put my name down to see the governor, if I liked ; but I did not like, for my name was so often put down without my consent, that I deemed it prudent to endure this new blow with patience. So I and Soda, twin reprobates, worked the crane together ; and I became, in his society, as dumb as regulations could desire, and turned my thoughts inwards on myself.

It was wonderful how my mind brooded over that project of Spevins's—that wild, impracticable project whereby I might become, some day, a licensed victualler. Of course the thing was so wild that I considered it more to distract my thoughts than for any other purpose. ‘Licensed to sell wine and spirits to be consumed upon the premises.’ I, whilom the artist, now the felon ! What a butterfly to result from what a caterpillar ! And not an ordinary publichouse-keeper, by any means. Of a quiet, superior kind for the sumptuous entertainment of gentlemen’s gentlemen in Mayfair !

The idea was so absurd that it was a good one to laugh at for five minutes ; but, to my pained surprise, I discovered that I was not

altogether laughing at it, that I was very far from being so indifferent as I could desire. Oh, that old Adam! How hard he is to kill! His quota of lives is more numerous than the cat's nine. Those ramparts of stoicism which had taken me nearly five years to build up so painfully, placing brick on brick, and mortaring each square with my life's blood, were very shaky. Would they totter down before, forewarned, I had time to shore them up? Working, as I was, along with Soda, I was in constant conflict with myself.

‘I am a denizen of a sea of sin,’ I kept repeating over, and over, and over, though my attention wandered sadly from the words. Around me all are bad; I myself, being reckoned one of the very worst, am harnessed with this brute. For us, there is no promised land, or green tree, or shrub. Good may exist somewhere—outside our circle. Within it, all is wicked. We are hopeless, and it is well that we should be prevented from preying upon society.’ And by dint of repeating this over and over, I regained a semblance of my old calm. I was Ebenezer

Anderson—a weed sprung out of the prison soil. As such, my duty was to do navvy's work, with occasional lulls of darkness and bread and water. I was never to leave this spot, unless drafted to some other prison. And as my gaze wandered across the flowery billows to the gaunt barrack that rose frowning in their midst, I recognised it as my natural *home*—with no moisture of the eye, no quiver of the lip.

One day our slowly-revolving mill-wheel stopped with a sudden jerk. I cannot look back upon that day, even after long years, without a spasm of the heart. Was I too happy, oh my God! in that, though with a bad grace, I could still submit? Was I as yet too stiff-necked?—not ground down sufficiently? Was my dreary hard apprenticeship to go for nothing? Was I, seared and maimed, to be flung down again to the bottom of the hill which I had climbed with an ensanguined sweat so far? There are trials so grievous that their very conception seems bred of frenzied phantasy. With bodily agony comes at last a numbness, for the human frame is not calculated to bear

beyond a certain measure. Why should it not be so with the soul? Had any man suffered as I had suffered, for so little? Bereft, at a blow, of child, honour, even name, I yet lived, or rather lingered, a marvel to myself. What had I done—what had I done—that my cup of gall should be filled to the brim again? I will hasten over this, for the recital burns me even now.

We were at work as usual. One portion of our party had detached a large lump of rock, and, by means of ropes and wooden rollers, had drawn it towards the crane. Thus much was accomplished by dinner-time. After dinner, we fell in and marched back to work. As he passed me to regain his post, Spevins whispered in my ear: ‘Look at Miffy.’ Turning, I did so, and was distressed to perceive that he, usually so listless, was as one distracted. His eyes were rolling in their sunken sockets; his teeth chattered as in an ague-fit; his step was uncertain, like that of a drunken man; a ghastly grey pallor was on his face. ‘He is very ill,’ I thought; ‘how strange of the warder not to notice it.

Mayhap he'll recover by-and-by ; if not, I'll point it out to him myself.'

Several men were told off to raise the block ; amongst them, Jaggs. It was too heavy for them. I let the wheel go and set the chain running, that they might slip it round the stone as it lay upon the ground. Then my mate and I took each a handle of the wheel and hoisted the block in mid-air, whilst Miffy tried to back the cart beneath it. But he was still under the influence of the same violent excitement, lurching against the wheel as if buffeted by wind. A turn brought him face to face with Soda—the one below, and the other beside me on the crane-platform—and, losing all control, the unhappy man flung both arms into the air, and pointed with quivering fingers at my mate.

' You've stolen it. What have you done with it ? ' he gasped. ' My one—my only one. Give it back—give it back to me ! '

The warder was standing at a distance, on a ledge of rock. Descending from his perch, he approached with the dignified tramp of a policeman.

' What has he stolen ? ' I asked.

The wasted cheeks of the postmaster were flushed now, and, with a hollow cough, he pressed a hand to his side, as though in pain.

‘My wife’s letter!’ he implored. ‘I left it in my Bible, and he’s taken it away. It’s all I have to remind me of my darlings! The only one. Oh! make him give it back to me!’

‘I took it—you fool?’ retorted Soda, fiercely. His lower jaw was protruded; a sinister light shone from beneath his swollen eyelids. ‘What should I want with your infernal rubbish?’

The humorous side of Jaggs was tickled. Turning to me he said with a chuckle, behind his hand:

‘Fancy the loony smokin’ him. What a game! He prigged it, I know, to get hold of the missus’s new address. Lord bless yer, he’s bin workin’ her these three years, unbeknown, to square the screw for our tobacco.’

So this was how the wretch had managed to bribe the warders. I saw it all. By searching Miffy’s letters, he had discovered his wife’s address, and placed her in private

communication with the peach-faced one, who received small, hard-earned sums from her hands, under the impression that her husband would thus gain a few extra comforts. Then she had changed her address, and the young warder had left for Portland, and, no longer living next door to his victim, Mr. Virgin had been obliged to filch his letter, instead of reading and replacing it. What a scoundrel!—as cold-blooded in this as Jaggs had been—to play on the poor woman's heartstrings, and bleed her of shillings for the sake of a pinch or two of the weed!

I was about to give vent to my disgust, when Miffy, who had overheard, was carried away by a whirl of fury which tore him like the rage of one possessed. For a second or two his livid lips moved without forming coherent words; he clutched at his throat as though to force it to obey his will; then broke into a shrill torrent of hysterical reproach—calling down, with beckoning finger, the vengeance of the All-Seeing; appealing to the Most High to burn up with His lightnings this wretch!

Soda gave a low growl and showed his tusks, and, by a deft movement, swept my

hand from the wheel, and, twisting his leg within mine, tripped me up and sent me sprawling on my back. I gave a shriek of horror, for the strength of one man could not hold back that wheel, with the chain so burthened. Soda made prodigious efforts to stop it ; but in vain. The chain rattled, the block swung for an instant in the air, then down it came with a horrid thud, with all its tremendous weight, and Miffy lay under it—a bloody heap of clothes.

I felt stunned ; while all who witnessed the scene sent up a wail of dread. Everyone was shouting and gesticulating, and pointing at my mate and me. Soda alone was collected.

‘ A bad job,’ he muttered, with an uncouth semblance of regret. ‘ 122 here let go, but I did my best to stop it, sir ; I did indeed. Any of ’em will tell you that, I’m sure. Poor bloke ! I’m afeard he’s done for ! And so soon going out, too. What a pity !’

Some of the excited men around reviled me ; some sneered that a gentleman lag was not likely to stick at anything.

The warder really had perceived nothing,

for the scene passed in an instant, and then all the rushing quarrymen had gathered round the body like a flight of jabbering crows. But for dignity's sake, and in the cause of order, he was bound to know all about it ; so singling me out, he cried :

‘ Ebenezer Anderson ! for shame, you incorrigible man ! I saw you do it. It may possibly go hard with you ; so I advise you to hold your tongue.’

I took his advice and said never a word, whilst he put the handcuffs on me. Some of the men evidently thought I had done it on purpose ; others only through culpable neglect. Spevins whispered, in an effort at consolation :

‘ Cheer up ! It wasn't your fault, I know !’

Slowly the *cortége* of death passed through the gates—the second within six months. Miffy had gone to join his friends. Soon the flowers would wave over him—the shadows would play hide-and-seek upon his bed. His fretted cord was snapped. Happy fellow ! he was at rest ! Oh, how I envied him !

There was another grand investigation. Again a director arrived, and lunched and

liked the pickles, and discussed the crops, and then went back again to town. A picked number of the quarrymen were called on to give their versions. They were all different. Some invented details for the sake of airing their ingenuity ; some out of mere spite to the gentleman lag ; some, in a vague hope of some possible advantage accruing to themselves. The governor, taking inspiration from his museum, roared at them—said they were dogs ; that he always knew a convict could not speak truth ; that they felt a devilish enjoyment in getting one of their own lot into a mess ; that they ought, every man-jack, to be swept from the earth's surface. Finally, the verdict went forth that it was a case of culpable neglect on my part. The governor cocked his moustache and glared at me, and gave me a long lecture, whereat the warders in attendance pretended, one and all, to be overcome. It was a sad thing—a very sad thing, he said, for a gentleman so persistently to lower himself. I was one of the most sullen, most obstinate, most incorrigible men on the establishment. I was always making a bother and giving

unnecessary trouble, and seemed to glory in my own abasement. I should live and die a felon, he was sorry to inform me, for as to my case ever being reconsidered, that was a contingency quite out of the question with reference to such a man as I. I was to undergo, by order of the director, such and such punishment, and I was to consider myself devilish lucky to have got off so cheap!

So ended the harangue, and I was marched to the punishment-cells—those cells which I had visited so often—and left there to chew the cud of my own thoughts.

I marvelled at my own calmness. The swift swoop with which this new blow fell upon my skull deadened the faculties of the victim much as the first had done. I was foolish to be calm; but all along I had been foolish. It would be better to dash my head against the wall and make an end of it, as I ought to have done five years ago. One murder I had committed, and was shrewdly suspected of a second. Perhaps I really had done it on purpose. Had I? To take a burthen from a back which was too weak to

bear it ; to free the purloiner of a few stamps from the persecutions of a world whose injustice was equal to both him and me. Why did no one think of doing me so good a turn ? ' Well, perhaps I did do it on purpose,' I thought in apathy. If I did, it was out of sheer benevolence. I was distinctly his benefactor. Would no one stretch out an equally kind hand to me ? I would stand still ; would promise not to wince or so much as move a muscle as the friendly stone came down. But, alas ! a pariah such as I might not hope to be so much considered ; and as I thought of it all, the rampart of stoicism broke asunder and fell aside, and I writhed and bit my fingers in the impotent sense of a great wrong, as had happened five years back. There were no tears now to come to my relief ; their spring was dried up for ever. My heart was hard, and I thanked God for that. Though my soul, which was immortal, lingered in its ruined tenement, its more happy sister was no more. My heart, though still it seemed to throb and flutter, was shrivelled, scorched, and calcined.

Old Scarraweg came frequently to see me ;

indeed kept me almost exclusively under his own care for a while, and looked at me with grave eyes, out of the depths of which shone pity. Why should he pity me? I resented it as an affront. Sometimes he spoke to me in his gruff way, with a rough hand upon my shoulder, mumbling that all was not lost, even now, though no doubt it was a bad job and no mistake—that many a small craft weathers a great storm—and then, crouching down, I ground my teeth at him, shouting out :

‘I’ve committed murder twice, do you hear? I plead guilty. Why can’t you hang me and have done with it? Is a rope so dear? Is it so difficult to do your duty?’

Once his kind talk drove me to such a pitch of exasperation, that I took up my stool and made as though I’d brain the old man with it. One murder—two—why not a third? Ha, ha! there’s luck in uneven numbers. Luck! I had been lucky, truly. Instead of dodging an expected blow, the chief-warder folded his arms and looked me sternly, without blenching, in the eyes.

‘Strike if you dare,’ he said, ‘and I swear that I will not report you. It may do you good, shipmet.’

I peered back into his eyes, and the stool dropped from my slackened grasp. I did not mean what I said, and the sea-dog knew it. Sometimes I yelled, and shrieked, and chattered, and whooped, and screamed all the night, beset by a fancy that I was surrounded by a horde of devils. And I was. They were plainly visible. I saw them in the darkness of the cell, crawling like rats upon the pavement, climbing like fleas upon the wall, hanging like spiders from the ceiling. They said I was to be of good cheer, and keep up my spirits, and that all would yet be well. Soon I would be one of them, if only I were worthy ; I had been slack so far, too much given to the ebb and flow of moods ; and yet I had shown promise. However grievous this life may be, we know that it must end some day ; there lies the real boon of this our sojourn on the earth. Man may be cruel and unjust ; woman may be faithless ; the world a dun desert, without a speck of verdure—we know that it has its limits ; that the

way, though toilsome, will come to an end at last; that the whole span of this phase of our existence, however interminable it may appear to us, is less than an inch. 'Why, then,' chattered the devils, as they danced up and down and played leapfrog on the stones, and swung in filmy hammocks from the roof, and touched my head with elfin fingers whose contact electrified my brain, 'why then dally with opportunity? If I desired to be a devil as they were, for ever and ever'—mark that—'nimble, jovial, brisk, impalpable, I must gain my diploma as they long ago on earth had done. What? They knew, for they had been watching, that I had no finger in Miffy's death. Had I let go the stone which crushed him, then my noviciate as a devil-cadet would be over, my diploma gained, for I would deliberately have slain one who never did me injury. But I hovered, undecided, between two armies, belonging to neither. I must take heed lest after the battle I should come to be disowned by both.'

What was I to do? I cried to the rabble rout, for scales had fallen, and I saw clearly at last.

I had prayed to God in vain, He would not have me. I yearned now to be one of them—to climb as they did around the prison-bars ; to hold out false lights to labouring vessels, to lure them on the rocks and quicksands ; to lead souls to their destruction in this and other planets, now and evermore. What would the kind spirits have me do ? If they would but command, how gladly would I obey ! The neophyte had been blindly groping—so long—so long. Anything, however desperate ! There was no God in heaven. He was a myth. What would they have me do—quick !—that, knitting the ravelled strands of the neglected past, I might not lose another precious moment ?

Scarraweg became graver day by day, and shook his head and rubbed his Newgate frill. My condition he evidently thought was critical. The devils jogged me in the ribs, but he did not see them. I laughed till water poured out of my eyes—water that had naught to do with the soothing gush of tears—and crowed and moped and mowed at him, and did clumsy shuffles on the narrow square

of floor, as I had seen Soda do when first he came here.

The governor reconnoitred through the observation-hole, and went away muttering something about 57 Party; and over his wine with the deputy governor, whose guest he condescended now and then to be, spoke of that Ebenezer Anderson as a fine case of the predestined convict.

‘Born a gentleman, sir, with every advantage of education, but couldn’t escape the mustard-coloured jacket for all that. You may take my word as gospel, sir, for I understand these cattle. Everything has been done for that man; upon my honour, everything! Useless and ridiculous! There’s no such thing as the reform which those people at Whitehall are always bothering about. Do I know best, or do they? Their knowledge is theoretical; mine, sir, is practical. Next time there’s a commission, or any philanthropic busybody worries, I’ll point to that Ebenezer, and they’ll collapse. Excellent diet, healthy work, best religious instruction; what more could he have? And look at him. He’s worse, sir, infinitely worse than

he was four years ago. 57 Party's the only thing, and we'll try it straight away. What do you say? Mad? Pooh, pooh, sir! Not a bit of it. They're a race apart. Demoralising comrades? Bother! You're as bad as the philanthropic busybodies. What better comrades is he fit for?

And, driven to bay as I was, his assertion was correct enough. I was quite fit now to be George Virgin's mate.

If the Scripture-reader had only been alive, how I should have frightened him! Doctors came and sat beside me, while stalwart warders stood vigilant hard by. They asked me questions. I answered as the devil bade me, who close to my ear was swinging in his filmy hammock. They screwed up their lips till the mouth of each was but a small round hole, and looked concerned and sighed.

What fun was this! What recked they of such as I? But they had to earn their wage, and this was their way of doing it.

'The governor's mistaken: he's evidently mad,' one murmured. 'I always said that that sullen self-contained manner of his boded no good for the future. It's mania---homi

cidal mania. He'll have to be sent to Broadmoor, to be classed among the dangerous lunatics.

Then the thought flashed on me in a ray of lurid light :

‘ Mad ! am I ? Perhaps I am ! Oh, joy at last ! Death am I denied, but I am granted at length the secondary grace. I am mad, or going mad—blissful visions shall be mine ! I shall dwell in Fairyland—skim on rippling waters in the thick shade of lotus-bowers. My skilly shall be ambrosial food, my water nectar.’

But the devil in the hammock fretfully changed his leg and shook his horns. I was not to be mad ; I must be sane, and do what I had to do with a clear brain and stony heart.

‘ Might I pretend to be mad ? ’ I pleaded ;
‘ just a little, to soften my present lot ? ’

‘ No ! ’

Well, then, I would obey. So, turning on the doctors with a sharpness which caused them to recoil in a heap, I said :

‘ You try to persuade me by your talk that I am mad. I’m not. See ! how regular my

pulse, how evenly throbs the blood within my breast. I am not mad ! I am as sane as you, and disdain to clutch the help you offer me !'

But the devils were not so kind as I had hoped. They had suffered themselves so much in days of yore that they were cruel. In vain I pleaded to be shown my path. How was I, feeling in the dark, to distinguish one narrow footway from another. But they only swung and swung till I was giddy, and touching my brain with reviving electric finger, whispered 'Search !' Racked by this riddle to which I could see no answer, I became, by turns, violent and moody. All I demanded was not much. Was I not eager to join their band—to become one of the joyous gambolling crew. A hint ! a word—no ! They only danced up and down the floor and leaped over each other as they stooped—and sang in chorus, 'Search !'

The pestilent Ebenezer smashed everything on which he could lay his hand, and the exertion did him good. He tore his sheets and blankets into tiny shreds, and sitting naked like a savage, pelted his guardian with the débris as if it had been snow.

Would this do? Was I acting rightly? The devils shook their horns, and still whispered 'Search!' Bitterly dejected and wearied out, I flung myself down upon my bedplace. Neither God nor devil would have aught to do with me. I had no place in heaven, nor yet in hell. I was to wander in chaos, a solitary phantom—still. Scarraweg thought that the crisis was past. I heard him say in the passage, to an attendant warder, with a sigh: 'He ain't going mad—not he—more's the pity. The paroxysm is over, but it'll come on again. I've watched this so often. He'll turn a real "out-and-outer," and stop here all his life!'

'Wouldn't he do that in any case?' inquired the assistant, who was a new-comer.

'He needn't have done so,' returned the elder. 'It's sartain that his sentence was remitted once when he was not scragged; but his case was such a queer one, that if he'd only have conducted himself properly, the question would have been overhauled later on. But there's where it is, you see. The system says, "You behave yourself, and

we'll see what we can do"—forgetting that in a given condition it's next to impossible for a sensitive man to behave himself. He gives way to despair, and there's an end of him. Worse luck, I say! for 122 has had no little to put up with.'

I lay without motion upon the bedplace where I had flung myself, and the company of devils swinging from the roof stared down at me with grins. 'Search!' they said: 'wake up and search, lazybones!' My blood was rushing, tingling in my veins—my temples beat, and my ears thundered, while I sought. Eureka! I had found the key. The path I had travelled for five years was thorny—tangled with a sheet of briars and brambles, the last incline more rugged than the rest. But it was past—the goal was won. My heart was dead indeed. The fountain of my tears was parched. My case was so peculiar that it was bound to be overhauled. Was it? One unmerited blow, and then another. It was time for me seriously to rebel. What did I owe to God or man? Nothing but curses—curses—curses! I would reform, I told the devils, as they purred their faint

applause. If they would only help, I would keep my turbulent temper well in check—the fetters that held it should be cunningly contrived. Not a prisoner—not even Tilgoe himself—should be half as exemplary as I. Years might pass. I cared not how many, for I was supported now by a settled purpose—a definite hope. I would get out—no matter when; and from that moment, whensoever it should come, would a war begin between the world and me—a war to the knife—stern and implacable and pitiless. As I had suffered, so should others suffer; as I had writhed, so should others writhe. Were the devils satisfied—was that the key? With my hand against every man, and every man's against mine, might my diploma not be earned; might I not thus win my place among their dusky ranks for ever and for ever? 'Yes!' they all screamed with deafening shrieks, which nearly cracked my ear-drums, and danced up and down and in and out, along the floor, the walls, the ceiling; and swung on airy elfin cords. 'Yes, if you have patience!'

'Never fear! I will be patient,' I replied.

Next time that the chief-warder came to look at me, he was taken aback by the sudden change. I had not torn my new clothes; they were neat and tidy. The lowering look which had deformed my comeliness for years was gone—the surly lowering expression which so irritated the dapper governor.

‘Shiver my timbers! what’s up now?’ he asked.

‘Nothing,’ I returned, smiling; ‘I think I must have been out of my senses this long while; but now you see I’m clothed and in my right mind. I’ve had much time for meditation here alone. Thanks for your past kindness, sir—you’ll find me a changed man.’

The old gentleman scratched his head and growled—smelling a rat. ‘You’re somehow different—no doubt about it,’ he admitted suspiciously. ‘You’re not up to tricks, are you? You convicts are woundily crooked cattle. Harkee, my hearty! if you’re going to turn over a new leaf, no one’ll be more glad than I; but if you’re up to tricks, it’ll be the worse for you.’

And with that he went away, mumbling to himself as he stroked his ragged whiskers : ‘ That chap’s beyond me--always was and always will be. I’ve talked to him often enough in vain ; he only snarled. What’s this new fake as is come over him that he should be converted?’

Converted ! I was worse than I had ever been before.



CHAPTER XX.

A CHANGE IN THE RÉGIME.



HUS did I arrive at the stage in my soul's travail when I deliberately decided to 'howl with the wolves.' The chief-warder looked at me askance for a long while, for he was little accustomed to 'reform,' and still less so to miracles. He knew very well that 'the system' brings little reformation in its wake—that the ultra-sensitive ones become crushed or hardened, whilst the common fry remain unchanged. It is the 'middlemen,' if I may use the expression, who emerge from the furnace purged. The ordeal they have suffered has been great and terrible; their sin was due to an instant's weakness, for which, while they fell, their consciences cried

aloud. Buoyed by a certainty that their friends will find them employment, they resolve to sin no more. Like burnt children, they will dread the fire which has merely scorched, not maimed them beyond recovery.

I was not one of that sort, as Scarraweg knew right well. He was aware that 'the system' would pass over me like a steam-roller, and had come accordingly to take a kind of surly interest.

That I should be constantly in trouble was only natural. In his opinion it was a subject for gratulation that my frequent 'flyings-out' should have assumed so trivial a form as they had done. But this sudden change was altogether removed from customary routine. There was something *louche* about this. He looked at me askance, therefore, wondering whether I might be trying to throw him off his guard with the intention of committing suicide. He had seen such cases in his experience. Many a man had been painfully well-behaved for a few days, had sent for the chaplain, and discoursed edifyingly with him as to a desire to receive, as a reward for good conduct, a visit or a letter; and then, next

morning had been found hanging to the ventilator—an exasperating corpse that gave trouble.

I manifested no such intention, and by degrees the chief-warder was satisfied.

‘This is the queerest turn,’ he grumbled, as week after week passed and my penal record remained clean—a record which bore as a frontispiece the photograph of a refined face, with a wild and wicked smile on it, and a well-formed head, with hair clipped close ; and after that a list of reports for misbehaviour which filled at least a dozen pages.

No more reports. After a while I returned to work—thank heaven ! no longer at the crane ; the first sight of it turned my blood cold, and caused me almost to falter in my purpose. Soda (with a new mate) still worked at it, and as I approached shuddering, with head bent down, saw him look round, with a jaunty air and a sneer on his flat, villain’s countenance which caused my fists to crumple up in spite of me. Then the reflection that he could bear to stand there, knowing what he had done, filled me with a sort of admiration. This was the state to

which I must bring myself—nay, had brought myself. Glancing up, I met his eye steadily, and passed on with a half smile to my old corner, where Jaggs and Spevins were still working—where the latter had by gradual stages brought his comrade completely round to his own way of thinking.

During my absence, it appears, they had had much talk—had been counting up in whispers the exact time which would elapse before discharge. Five years more! Then there was remission-time which was to be gained by quiet behaviour—the behaviour of both was perfect—say, allowing for accidental loss of marks, four years more—about four years or so. Pooh! it would soon pass; then they would be free, and a grand joint-stock company would be organised, such as should cause the upper ten to wince!

Jaggs had been making up to the parson, he said, who, since the death of the Scripture-reader, had been attending to his business a little, and from him had obtained the privilege of French books and dictionaries out of the library, instead of twaddling, goody-goody periodicals. He could already boast

of a smattering of the Gallic tongue ; now he was ‘studying foreign lingoos grammatically,’ he remarked. ‘That sort of thing would be very useful in the new venture. Why, an hour of assiduous study alone in his cell every evening would do wonders. Four times 365 was close on 1,500. What might not be learnt in 1,500 hours ? What was the use of mastering French and German ? Why, bless your soul alive, he urged, think of the effect upon under-butlers and grooms of the chamber of being able to patter the parlyvoo for all the world like their own lords and ladies ! They’ll look up to me with awe, and—ahem !—I think with my polished manners thrown into the scale, I may say without self-laudation that they’ll tell me all about the plate-chests in no time. I was always told that I had *kunnoodling* ways. What with my French, and what with my deportment, I think—ahem !—that I shall be found a great success.’

Spevins looked at him and shook his head. He was by no means so sanguine as his ally.

‘You’ve too much deportment, my good chap,’ he said mournfully. ‘You’re like

some of the city ladies as plaster themselves with jewellery to mask the shop. The more they sticks on, the more you see that they haven't an H to their backs. Upper servants are sharp judges of character, and can tell a real gent from such as you or I with their eyes shut. I'm told that at a country 'ouse, they stands in the 'all to reckon up them as are come to stop, and can tell to a tanner what the tip'll be from each when he goes away. They must know that, for they behaves more or less civil accordin'. 'Tis their business. No; we shan't succeed unless there's a real tip-topper for commander-in-chief—one as can patter parlyvoo, for instance, without seeming to say, as you would do, "Just listen to me now; ain't it wonderful?" One whom they'll think it a honour to know—a sort of a condescendin'-like. That's what we want.'

'Like me—you told me once,' I put in quietly.

'Ah, you!' Spevins said, with a sigh. 'I'm afeard you're done for—and I'm sorry for it. You go on wus and wus. I knew though that you had nothin' to do with that

unlucky devil's death. I see'd Soda do it ; but I couldn't tell what I saw, for they didn't ask me, and I should only have got clobbered over the nut for being officious. It's a sad pity. You are uncommon unfortunite.'

'This last business has made another man of me,' I replied dreamily. 'You'll think it queer, but I went into that dark cell a raging tiger, and I've come out—well, that's neither here nor there. I am altogether altered, as you'll perceive.'

Spevins regarded me with long attention, and said, by-and-by :

'If this should be so, it's real rum. I do seem to see a change somehow. Stick to it, old pal ; and if you do—hooroo ! I'll giv' a toast. We ain't got no cham 'andy—these hotels are so blooming ill-provided. Here's a toast, mates, all the same, "May the governor of Dartmoor have to advertise for lodgers !"'

And with mock gravity, he went through a pretence of filling a glass, of lovingly regarding the sparkling beads, of draining it to the dregs with a loud smack ; after which piece of elegant pantomime, he went cheer-

fully to work again, and hammered at the rock as though the glass of champagne had given him new courage.

I related what I had heard Scarraweg say, and he listened with puckered brow and deferential interest, as he always did to any remarks of mine, and when I had done, nodded approval.

This was first rate—nothing could be better. He had always thought my case quite different from others. If I only had strength of mind to stick to my resolve, all would come right as ninepence. He and Jaggs would be out before me probably; they would get things in order, hoping for the best, and remain rather on the quiet—not to say the square—watching for my release. Meanwhile it would be well to employ such time as we could get together in discussing *pros* and *cons*, and striving to foresee difficulties, so that if any such should show themselves whilst I was still in durance, he and Jaggs and others would endeavour to set them straight.

As my good conduct continued, and my demeanour grew more coldly calm—with a

calmness more of apparent content than sullenness—Spevins' respect for me increased to the pitch of awe. It was so ludicrous that it often made me smile. Here was the triumph of mind over matter indeed !

Professional details I had to learn from him, then sift and twist them into their newly intended shape—while he nodded his admiration with flashing teeth, and even slapped his thigh sometimes in the ecstasy of his enjoyment.

'If we had coves like you to marshal us,' he often affirmed, 'the pleece would be nowhere. We'll be the arms and you'll be the 'ed, old cock, and we'll snap our fingers at the lot. The only reason they nab us now, is that our brains hev got down into our calves and bicepses. You can't expect us to have calves and brains as well.'

Which sad result of an imperfect anatomy was so depressing to his feelings, that his lips closed tightly over his teeth, and he became for a moment exceedingly melancholy. Thus was I his pupil and he mine. His influence was, in its way, as great over me as mine was over him. Fate had driven us together from two

widely distant rungs of the social ladder. It behoved me to accept with cheerfulness the decrees of fate. I liked Spevins much for his animal spirits, and odd theories, and quaint ways of speech; and was thankful for my superior education, in that it established a corresponding interest in his bosom for me to that which I felt for him. Yes! the die was cast. I was to be the head, while he and such as he were to be the arms. Together we would lash the withers of society—it would not be my fault if the jade were galled that had brought me to this pass.

The mind of the chief warder was relieved. Old Scarraweg, convinced at last that in my case a miracle had really been accomplished, was full of praise and congratulation. It was satisfactory to see a 'bad un' turn over a new leaf. The quality of his work worried Scarraweg much sometimes. He had even been known to grumble anathemas at an ungrateful country who could find no better berth for her worn-out soldiers and sailors than the keeping of a kennel of curs. At such moments he would

come and survey my tranquil visage over his silver spectacles, and tramp away again comforted. Once the kind old man asked if I was not tired of the quarry ; whether I would not like to be transferred into the shops ?

Convicts are for ever wanting to be in some other place than that in which they find themselves—are constantly imploring the governor to move them to some other party than that with which they happen to be placed. But I shook my head.

‘No, sir, thank you,’ I answered. ‘I’m very well where I am. The open air suits me ; the ozone-laden breeze is in itself an enjoyment ; and our enjoyments are not so many that we can afford to let one slip.’

‘Would I not like to learn a trade—say, carpentering. I would become a skilled workman in time—be set to make ornamental book-cases for the Admiralty, or some such thing, which would be amusing to one like me, who had been an artist.’

No—with many thanks for the kindness of the suggestion. A trade ! was I not learning a trade—a trade which required skill, forethought, artistic management ? Were

not Spevins and Jaggs my twin-masters; I their obedient, zealous apprentice? and did I not return to them in condensed and improved form the ideas with which they furnished me?

Two years passed over us—still my record remained clean—still we marched forth and back again, and forth and back again—human automata, moving in obedience to a spring. Two years more! my two companions reckoned. Two years for them; how many more for me? Alas! my case didn't look promising, and I sometimes wondered whether I was being deceived. Had I turned over a new leaf and become an angel of light for nothing? Hoodwinked! snared into propriety! The notion filled me with unseemly anger, which it behoved me to keep down. I should discover in time whether I was being tricked. If I were—well, it would be time to think of what I'd do when I knew for certain that I had been fooled.

The little martinet was not so enchanted by my display of the clean new leaf as his chief warder was. Though kind-hearted at

bottom—a delightful companion, I believe, when outside the prison-walls—he was opiated, and prided himself upon special things, to which he clung tenaciously. Now, one thing he prided himself most upon was an intimate knowledge of the ways of convicts.

‘They’re crooked cattle, sir—very crooked cattle,’ he was always repeating, ‘but I can foretell each turn. Reform ’em, sir? Oh, pooh! you can’t reform ’em. Its only the outsiders, who know nothing about ’em, that gabble such rubbish. They’re not to be reformed—not worth reforming. All we can hope to do, is to keep ’em quiet and withdraw ’em from their haunts for a while; for which I’m sure you owe us a debt of gratitude! We’re like the Italian flea-powder that sends the insects to sleep for the night. The abominable creatures are there in swarms—you can’t clear the bed of ’em—quite impossible, excuse the unsavoury simile, but you keep ’em quiet; keep ’em quiet, sir, and they don’t bite, and you’ve good cause for gratitude. Now, sir, the fellow that threw this chisel at me—’pon

my word and honour, an awful scoundrel!—upon my sacred word he tried to take my life, at least a dozen times; would you believe it, sir?’ And so on and so forth, a long story which tended to convince his hearer of the little man’s acumen, and the frightful danger in which he stood from onslaughts by awful scoundrels.

As it happened he had made up his mind on my arrival that I was an awful scoundrel, one of the incorrigibles who, impelled by Satanic influence, would drift into 57 Party, and fling chisels at the sacred head, and die some day in the infirmary blaspheming. He made up his mind as to this, and, but for an unforeseen circumstance, it might have ended so. But when Scarraweg pointed out, week after week, how well I was behaving, and begged that I might have marks restored, and even be promoted to the first-class, it was too much for his equanimity. He was annoyed that he should so egregiously have misread me, and growled out to his trusty second:

‘You’re an old idiot, Scarraweg, an old idiot, sir! That man’s shamming—he’s a

moral malingerer, sir ! Mark my words and see, I ought to know, I suppose ? You're an old woman—a silly old woman to be taken in !

Facts, however, are facts, and a penal record, unmarred by reports, speaks for itself. So reluctantly he was compelled gradually to restore my marks and place me in the first class. My blue collar gave me certain privileges, about which, for themselves, I cared not at all ; were not all my energies concentrated on one object, on one goal, which receded as I gazed on it ? I saw with apprehension that the governor disliked me, that the sight of my blue collar was offensive to him, whilst he was never tired of admiring the vagaries of the repentant Tilgoe, who was a red collar man now as well as nurse. It was very hard that I, too, might not turn penitent. The governor was personally aggrieved at my good behaviour, altogether declined to look on me in the light of a male Magdalen, it was clear that he would never be induced to take up my case, or allow anybody else to do so. I had no friends without to whom I could

apply. Scarraweg, of course, could do nothing while his chief was in this mood. Was I then doomed after all to die an old wreck in that infirmary? Oh! if I could only know if this adverse wind was to blow for ever, that I might shape my sails according to its blast! If I could only pierce into the future for a second! More than once I very nearly broke down, in despair of tangible encouragement. I panted now for liberty as before I had prayed for death or lunacy.

But an unexpected series of circumstances occurred which changed all this, and made me thank the hovering demons, who encouraged their neophyte, in that I had not succumbed. The Governor of Chatham died of apoplexy. The Governor of Dartmoor accepted his place with gladness as it was promotion. Eight or nine years of Dartmoor are more than enough for the most patient governors! He bustled off to his new post; and then another came—quite a young gentleman—quiet in manner, upright and soldierly in bearing, who started a new regime by which I was the immediate gainer. At this time too a Royal Commission was

appointed to go into the question of penal servitude, things having leaked out which seemed to do little credit to 'the System,' and which it behoved a Government that dreaded the arrows of Opposition, to see set right forthwith.

As we have seen, when a Director came down, there was always a fine flourish and a luncheon, a craning out of windows, a general bustle and swaggering; a donning of swords and best uniforms. What was the commotion then in our tiny hive, when 'My lords' arrived, real live lords, commissioned by H.M., bent on looking into grievances, on cross-examining convicts, on putting officials on their P's and Q's? Princetown woke up and became bewilderingly hilarious. Carriages were constantly making the journey to Tavistock. Carts came rumbling and bumping over the ruts, laden with good things for the table of 'my lords.' Everybody was delighted. There were only two cross people in the colony, One was Scarraweg; the other was the general purveyor, who occupied the only shop, and who was naturally indignant because 'my

lords' presumed to despise his wares. Though they slighted him, they did not neglect the convict's food. They gravely poked the bread with their forefingers, solemnly tasted the skilly, and nodding all round proclaimed it excellent; sipped the admirable broth and sighed over the honest labourer who was out of work; vowed that the kitchen, at least, was perfect, and did every credit to 'the System.'

They made pretty speeches to old Scarraweg about 'Hearts of Oak,' and the 'old *Temeraire*,' but he only grunted and looked grim. He didn't approve of these doings.

'A nice thing!' he said, 'these gentlefolk coming worrying down here without any experience on the subject, asking questions of all these scamps as if they were honest men, putting new notions into their heads, which are full already of ideas subversive of discipline. The service is disagreeable enough as it is to those who live in it. It's a fine thing for these noblemen to spend five minutes here and then upset all our ways.'

And it was not surprising that the old chief warder should be annoyed. One noble

lord insisted upon being locked up with Soda for half an hour, in order that uninfluenced by the presence of a prison-official he might divulge, as if in the confessional, his reason for trying to escape ; and, it appears, that his inventive faculties were fully equal to the occasion, for my lord emerged from the interview with a scared face, murmuring that if what that prisoner said was true, the System was in a very bad way indeed. The Rev. Aurelius Tilgoe was likewise interviewed, but very little could be gleaned from him. He bleated, with a beatific countenance, that he had nothing to express but heartfelt thankfulness. He had sinned, grievously sinned, but had remembered those comforting words which declare that though sins may be scarlet, they shall be as white as wool. He was happy to be able to lay his hand upon his breast and say that his heart was dazzlingly white. He had passed through the valley of shame and desolation and had come out into the golden plain. In fact he led 'my lords' to believe, that, not only was he unfit for a prison, but too good even for long sojourn on the earth; and finished by thanking his inter-

locutors for kind inquiries, and declaring that he could have nothing to say against a system, which had wrought so remarkable a conversion as his own, or against officials, whose humane and judicious treatment had been the saving of his soul.

This was all very delightful. ‘My lords’ were charmed, and complimented the chaplain upon his ministry. That gentleman gave a modest bow, and said something about doing his duty, though it was hard, and added a suggestion under his breath about promotion to a London prison. There was a grand shaking of hands and scraping of feet; a general hope that nobody had given anybody else too much trouble; a taking off of hats and flourishing of wrist-bands; and then the *cortége* drove away, pleased with everything and everybody, to make an elaborate report; the smart swords and uniforms returned to their cases; Dartmoor went to sleep again; and the mill-wheel revolved slowly as of yore.

Not quite as of yore though, for the new governor introduced several changes on his own account, pending the more radical alter-

ations which might be suggested by ‘my lords.’ He moved the celebrated museum—joy of his predecessor’s heart—into limbo ; for he argued that the sight of the hideous array of implements with which the life of the ruler had been threatened from time to time by crafty ruffians, might suggest to others to go and do likewise. He inaugurated too a more friendly régime than the last, which at first led the cunning old lags to suppose they had to do with a *soft ’un*, until they found that a preliminary escapade or so was met with summary severity. He never roared at the prisoners, as the dapper martinet had been wont to do, and even condescended to argue with the men when he considered their complaints unfounded or their requests ridiculous. He made a practice of casually visiting a prisoner now and then, giving him a word of advice, instilling into him a little humanizing drop, and this most malignant practice caused the chaplain to groan in spirit and to strain every nerve to procure for himself a change—for was it not too bad that a governor should set so shocking an example of doing more than the regulations

inculcate? Is it not a well-known rule—time-honoured, hoary—that government officials should never do more than they are obliged? Had not the chaplain sat every day in his office from ten to four (paring his nails for want of better occupation) and was it his fault, he would like to know, if the stiff-necked convicts had not thought fit to send for him? Did he not tell them twice every Sunday how wicked they were—what more could they require? The Governor by visiting a prisoner in his cell was doing Scripture-reader's work, which was in offensively bad taste. In the old days Dartmoor was bad enough, but now it was becoming quite abominable.

The new governor, among other eccentric things, took to studying the penal records in private, in order to obtain some insight into the characters of his gaol-birds, and in the course of this study was struck by the aspect of mine, as seeming to reveal a tempest-tossed nature which had found rest. How had it found rest—and why? He walked into my cell one evening while I was reading a book, and I—by instinct learnt long since

—jumped up at once and stood at attention, with toes in the third position, at the extreme end of my cabin.

‘Sit down,’ he said, mildly, ‘as you were. Have you got the books you like? You have only to ask to get them changed, you know.’

I looked at him, it was the first time I had seen our new task-master to speak to. A handsome young fellow, with a determined look about the brows, tempered by a dimple in each cheek. He stood chatting with me for a long time, more as man to man than as master to slave; and when he went away I fell into reverie, from which I was not aroused till the gong sounded for ‘beds down.’

‘If a man like that,’ I thought, ‘had taken me in hand at first, my career in prison might have been a very different one.’

Yet why should it? No kindness or consideration from those set over me could alter the wrong under which I smarted. All along I had clearly felt that it is oafish stupidity on the part of convicts to nourish a hatred for their jailors. They have bread

to earn, and they earn it by no pleasant means. No! That I should be treated kindly or unkindly mattered not. The vengeance which I sought to wreak was against the World, who, in carelessness and indifference, makes sweeping laws without taking the trouble to observe how they affect particular persons. It was admitted at the start that my case stood out from the line; but no notice was taken of it because my conduct was not good. What made my conduct bad? But of what use was it to return to that worn old question? This young governor with new-fangled notions of his own set me a-thinking. His suave, pleasant ways would not do with men like Jaggs or Soda. I felt sure of that; for they were not capable—being utterly selfish themselves—of understanding why one placed in authority should put himself out of the way on their account. First they would say he was soft, and try to take advantage of his softness. Having found out their mistake, they would say he was capricious, and hate him for it. No! Different kinds of prisoners require entirely different treatment. Where is the model

governor to be found who will unite in his own person all the contradictory attributes? Nowhere! All the more reason then for classing special assortments of gaol-birds under different kinds of taskmasters. How would the Reverend Aurelius get on with him? Would he see through the crafty, treacherous villain as Scarraweg had done, or would he be hoodwinked like the major? If he were seen through, then would the last period of his sojourn not be pleasant; for up to this time Scarraweg had merely held his hand in obedience to the will of his superior. If both agreed to act in concert, the berth of the male Magdalen would cease to be even as bearable as heretofore. But his time was nearly up; he would in the natural course of things be out directly; and what then? What had happened to the precious Book? Was it ready for press? had it appeared? No! not yet, or we should have heard of it from new arrivals, who always brought us a whiff of what was happening outside. Since Mr. Tilgoe's promotion to the hospital I had seen little of him, and was glad of that; for, though I could like Spevins and be recon-

ciled to Jaggs, my soul revolted still against the midnight bravo, the assassin of the slums, the stabber in the back ! I laughed when I thought of the venom which must have accumulated since his abortive attempt to procure release. Had he added more chapters to the Book—invented more fables ? Then his attitude of angelic resignation before ‘my lords !’ He was a wonderful fellow, was the Reverend Aurelius. He would soon go out—how soon come back to us ? Then I fell a-dreaming about my own prospects. The hopelessness of my position had vanished like mirage. The autocrat who hated me was gone, the new autocrat already showed an interest. How well for me that I had not tossed up the sponge ! It was plain, that, encouraged as I was, my efforts must be redoubled. Not a rule, however trivial or vexatious, must be broken ; not a shadow of complaint must be permitted to arise. The perfect Ebenezer must challenge comparison with the cherubic Tilgoe. This humane governor must be smitten with sorrow for the troubles of the angelic Anderson ; he must be induced by patience under adversity to take up the

case with warmth ; to direct public attention to the incarcerated martyr. Surely this was no difficult task. It required only patience. In this harsh school did I not learn patience long ago ?

Jaggs and Spevins, when they saw how the wind was blowing, were enchanted.

‘Old cove,’ Spevins cried, clapping me with glee upon the back, ‘you’ll be out in a pig’s whisper, take my word for it. It’s a pity my lords didn’t speak to you while they was here ; but they only asked questions of the complainers, who are always the worst lot, and you were no longer in that bunch. But it’s all right. Just you see if it isn’t !’

And it was. The governor sent for me again and again, old Scarraweg put in his oar, the chaplain was consulted, who replied peevishly that he could not be expected to know anything about a man who had never sent for him. The Scripture-reader might have known, but he was dead—which was most provoking. Why would he go tramping through the snow on some fool’s errand, instead of sitting by the fire like a sane creature ? I was asked to explain how the change had been

wrought in me. But the Tilgoe livery sat badly on my shoulders. My pride forbade my stating that I was a child of grace, so I answered simply that I could not tell. At first I had given way to despair, I said, but in course of time I had perceived that resignation was the most appropriate virtue for those who were marked with the broad arrow, that raging would do me no good, while decent bearing might improve my chances for a less cruel world than ours. All this appeared eminently sensible. Scarraweg nodded and grunted; the governor passed his fingers through the waves of his fair hair, and said it was most remarkable—that next time he went up to town he would see what could be done for me—that possibly the doctor might be got to report about me—that meanwhile I was not to give way to extravagant expectations, but to continue to behave well, and hope for the best.

A weight seemed taken off my back; a fierce exultation sent a tremor along my nerves; the lighthouse lamp burned clear and steady, quite within sight, with lurid ray. A little patience! a little, little patience! and the chains of my purgatory would be broken.

The report of my lords appeared in due course, in the form of portentous blue-books, which nobody read. Yet there am I not quite correct. Each governor read his own deposition, and thinking it very clever, caused all his friends to read it likewise. It was quite a curious thing that the blue-book which lay on the writing-table of each governor opened naturally at quite a different place. It was also curious that all other depositions, except the specially clever deposition, were 'heavy stuff'—amazing twaddle—not worth the printing, egad !

My lords declared that on the whole the system worked well. No one but fools and busybodies would suppose that it was perfect, considering that nothing here below is perfect. The skilly was wholesome ; the meat of the best ; the broth and cocoa unexceptionable ; the work not unduly hard. The treatment of convicts was better than that accorded by destiny to ordinary day-labourers. That was enough. Morbid meddlers were prone to picturesque desires. It would not be fitting, my lords declared, that those who were supposed to be undergoing punishment

should be petted and made too comfortable. There was one change, one important change, which occurred to them as likely to be requisite some day. *The prisoners talked too much to each other.* They were tossed pell-mell upon a dung-heap, without an attempt at sorting. In dust-bins we find cinders, rotting cabbage-stalks, foul offal, reeking filth; in the midst of all sometimes a silver teaspoon.

My lords were not of opinion that much small plate was to be found in the convict dust-bins; but at any rate it seemed only fair that inoffensive cinders should be separated, as much as might be, from decayed cabbage-stalks. In a word, they were strongly of opinion that some day or other a great classification must be made, whereby the black goats would be prevented from holding intercourse with mere blemished ewes.

Such a classification, however, would necessitate grievous labour. The sal volatile required by overworked Home Office clerks for headache due to exhaustion, would be an expensive item in the budget. A general election loomed in the distance. Cheese-

paring constituents would point with withering indignation at the item 'sal volatile,' demanding instant satisfaction—weariful explanations—from an extravagant and besotted government. That sal volatile item might be the cause of no end of harm.

But then, on the other hand, there were officious demagogues (the world is but a botched-up affair at the best) and inquisitive philanthropists—much the most tiresome to deal with of the two classes—who bothered high-placed officials out of their seven senses, and persisted in wanting to know the truth as to certain rumours.

Dreadful people these, who declined being tied up in red tape leading-strings—who flouted with vulgar contumely the high-placed officials who, in the dim religious light of the official sanctum, muttered that inquiry was 'out of order,' that everything was all right, that 'really, really, people must take things for granted up to a certain point, and abstain from teasing those who did their best—abstain likewise from expecting millennium to come on us all at once. Please—please, don't do things out of order !' whispered

the high-placed officials, as with deprecating hand-shakes they bowed out the inquisitive philanthropists; then comforted their harassed souls with just the least taste of sherry; muttering the while: 'How trying idle people are who have no business of their own! Have not my lords reported that on the whole things jog along pretty well? What more may we expect? In view of a general election, of course we must make a stir; rub up a grievance or two, in order to remedy it—much as *gamins* make a Guy for the express purpose of burning it.'

'Well, my lords report that some day something must be done. Very well, we'll do it some day. We'll have another Royal Commission some day, whenever it shall be deemed advisable. Meanwhile we'll make a compromise—nothing like a compromise; it's plausible and satisfactory, and will not entail that frightful expense in *sal volatile* which might rouse the dormant lion.'

So when the inquisitive philanthropist hung about the antechambers of the great, wanting to know what was to be done about

the prison-question, he was implored with seductive wheedlings 'to do nothing out of order—to be prudent as well as philanthropic; was begged to observe that if people only would do things in order the wheels of statecraft would run twice as smoothly, and ever so much more business be got through. And the said philanthropist eventually went away with 'order' on the brain, and dreamed fitful, uneasy dreams at night about the father of the Great Frederick, who was so great a lover of order that he kidnapped sons and husbands, and made homes desolate, that his grenadiers should all be of a height to half an inch.

Things were done in order. When asked in Parliament whether it was not a bad plan to throw prisoners of all classes and shades of misdemeanour into constant communication, ministers rose and agreed it was so; then declared that the question was a difficult one, such as would require care and thought, and that in course of time it would receive both. When asked whether penal discipline did not fall with deplorable inequality upon certain phases of mind and degrees of culture—whether treatment which might soberly

correct one class of person, was not likely to crush another and more sensitive one out of existence? they shrugged their shoulders, and admitted that such a thing was possible. 'But then, really—really,' they suggested, 'we must beware of hair-splitting. The cultured persons ought not to offend; if they so far forget themselves as to fall into sin, it's their own fault if they end in hell.'

The philanthropist, taking some exception to this theory, was forthwith smothered by an exhibition of the amount of work before the House. Business was business. Convicts were convicts, and as such were not worth all this bother. The treatment of convicts as a *body* was unexceptionable. Something would be done some day to reorganise the distribution of prisoners in classes; meanwhile a compromise would be effected, which must tide matters over for the present.

And so it was settled. Sunday walks in association were to be done away with by degrees. Prisoners were to take their exercise in silence, and in single file—a yard between each two men. Silence at labour

was to be more strictly enforced than heretofore. It remained to be proved how the compromise would work. Upon men like Jaggs and Spevins it came like a thunder-clap. Spevins especially groaned for sympathy through the chink in the partition between our cells. The dulness and monotony of prison life already weighed him down. If he was not to speak any more, how was he to occupy his mind? He could read no better than when he came, though he attended school regularly one hour a week. As he himself (though not precisely in these words) bitterly observed, 'Either teach me to write and read, or don't. If you think that, in the stage which we have reached, education would be a curse instead of a boon, well and good. Leave us in our ignorance; but do not hold out a cup to us, and when we try to drink whisk it from our lips. If we are to be taught to improve our minds, teach us; if not, away with the pretence!'

There can be no doubt that on minds like his the silent system falls as hard as indiscriminate contact with the lowest

ruffians did on mine. His mind was active, ingenious, full of resource as are the minds of the London arabs ; but deprived of communion, and thrown upon vacancy by inability to read, he moped and lost his appetite, and at last fell so sick that I began to wonder whether the grand project ever would be realised after all ; or whether, by one of those side-winds which baffle all human calculation, my bark would yet be wrecked—frail shallop that contained all my trêasure.

Spevins fell ill, and—a favourite with everyone—was sent, with little inquiry, into hospital, where he lingered in poor health for a long time. As far as myself went, I laughed at the new regulation. In my case the harm was done beyond repair. The canker of bad example had done its work—had wound its way into the recesses of a being unhinged. What did it matter now whether I took my walks alone or in companionship ? Spevins, Jaggs, and I were sworn allies ; we stood on the same platform, hand in hand. Our goal was the same ; the ambitions of our lives were of the same colour, more or less deep in shade. We all three panted to be out ;

we all three burned to set that scheme afoot whose success would gratify all of us equally from our several points of view. It was annoying, rather, not to be able to discuss its details on Sundays undisturbed. We should have to talk more during labour hours, for, try as they would, they could never stop our talking at labour. It would be a restrained, spasmodic, fragmentary conversation. We should have carefully to remember at what precise stage in a discussion we had last broken off. In this much the compromise was a mercy. So long as prisoners are not divided into classes, to prevent their communing one with another is out of the question. How much harm is done by fragmentary conversation is a separate matter altogether. Jaggs and I, therefore, in the absence of Spevins, turned over our prospects in our talk, and hoped, and planned, and built castles in the air. What did the governor's consoling words portend? I was not to weave a fabric of exaggerated hope. Yet, if hope had not been strong, he would never have been so cruel as to deal in such hints. Spite of the

mastery I had obtained over myself, I grew querulous and fretful. Scarraweg remarked it; and affirmed that years of outdoor navy labour were telling upon me—that a willing horse must not be overdriven—announced his intention of speaking to the governor, in order that I might finally be removed from the quarry.

Vainly I protested that I did not care—that I was indifferent—contented with my lot. One morning, on parade, when I had dropped into my usual place, and was mechanically holding up my arms to be searched, I was bidden to fall out, for the governor had something to say to me. Jaggs looked slyly round, and whispered, with still lips :

‘All right, old cock—good luck ! I knew it would come some day ;’ and then wheeled off for labour with his contingent, and I remained in the yard alone.

The different parties tramped off on their various avocations. I could hear the stonemasons and the sawyers—the breeze carried away the chaunt I knew so well :

‘26 Party, sir ; fifteen men all correct. 27 Party, sir ; nine, all correct. 28 Party, sir ; twelve, all correct.’

I stood for a moment alone, and felt somehow that I was on the threshold of a change—that I had almost done with the mammoth machine which drank up the sweat of our brows and lapped our life-blood, and swallowed our sinews one by one. I felt that now, or soon, I should cease to be marched about—to be harried round and round—to be moved hither and thither by word of command. How or why it was to be, or how it was to happen, I could not tell; but that it was to be I knew: and, contradictory creatures that we are, I looked after my party with a kind of yearning, in that I was no longer to trudge in the familiar ranks.

The chief warder shook his keys and beckoned me. By the central archway which gives admittance under a lofty tower to the governor's private office, I beheld a figure standing which I knew. A sleek, gentlemanly figure clad in demure grey cloth with a billycock hat upon its head. Wonder of wonders! It was the Reverend Aurelius Tilgoe '*in his hair!*' It was more than three months since I had seen him, so I did not know that he was growing his hair previous to receiving his ticket.

‘Good-bye,’ he whispered, ‘and God be with you. I’m out at last! Just look at these infernal togs. A pretty get-up, this, for a clergyman of the Church of England! I’ll mention it in the Book. If I say the cloth’s bad, the public won’t have means of knowing to the contrary, will they? Can I do anything for you outside? Petition the Secretary of State or anything of that kind, or write to the papers? If I can, command me, for when the Book’s out they’ll be in such a fluster that they’ll do anything for fear I should turn on the tap again. Oh, you infernal, damned, cursed place!’ he went on, grinding his teeth at the familiar tower, side-workshops, iron entrance gates; and the expression on his smooth engaging countenance became so diabolical that I was relieved when Scarraweg rattled his keys again to hurry me.

‘There’s the worst man in the establishment going out, thank goodness!’ the chief-warder remarked with satisfaction. ‘He’s bound to get in a mess again. Please Davy Jones that next time he’ll go elsewhere. The blue mud-pits of Chatham now, or a

good windy corner on a frosty morning on top of Portland cliff. But go in there—the guv'nor's summat to say to you, Anderson, and I'm glad—there—with all my heart, I'm glad—more glad than I've been this many a day.'

Actually the old fellow had water in his eyes, which by twisting round his nose with superhuman contortions, as though he took it for the minute-hand of a clock that was behind time, he was endeavouring to prevent from falling. I felt a singing in my ears and a dizziness of head, as I stumbled into the presence-chamber where the fair-haired young governor was writing. When he looked up he was smiling with that broad, beaming smile of his.

'Let me congratulate you, and myself, and the doctor here,' he said, holding out his hand. 'Her Majesty's Secretary of State has been gracious enough to take your peculiar case under his consideration, in consequence of certain representations of ours. He endorses my opinion as to its singularity, and in recognition of your admirable behaviour recently, under specially trying cir-

cumstances, has determined to allow you to earn double marks, and otherwise to mitigate the severity of your sentence. By his decision you will, if you continue to behave well, be set free on ticket-of-leave at the conclusion of twelve years, instead of having your case merely considered at the end of twenty. Let me see, you have been in now seven years. Therefore you may find yourself a free man again, received once more to all intents and purposes into the bosom of society, in five years from now. Let us hope that the lesson you have learnt in the way of controlling your passions may endure through life.'

My head swam round, and I clung to the table. The doctor, seeing how white I grew, handed me a glass of water. At last! The chain was to be riven, a palpable term was to be put to my misery. Five years! a mere nothing. Yes, oh yes! I had learned to control my passions. I had them under lock and key. Despite my Spanish blood, I had learned to be as cold and calculating as one of purely English birth. The paroxysm was momentary. I recovered

myself so quickly that my benefactor looked a little disappointed.

‘Scarraweg tells me,’ he continued, ‘that he advises your removal from the quarry. Let me see—a year of separates at Pentonville, six years at outdoor labour. Certainly, you shall be removed. Tilgoe leaves to-day, I am just making out his railway-ticket warrant. You shall have his place in the infirmary—an anxious post sometimes, when men are really ill; but genuine illnesses are rare. No words. Come, be off, and thank me by constant good behaviour.’

Returned to my cell, the demons danced in and out, and up and down; pousetting up and down, and round and round; shrieking out, ‘Well done!’ ‘Search!’ they had yelled in weird chorus, and I had found. ‘Have you patience?’ they had asked. ‘I have,’ I had affirmed. The noviciate was drawing to its close—the date was fixed. Five short years hence I was to be free—free to do their bidding—to earn the diploma which was to be a passport to their ranks. Free! I could scarce believe it, or even realise the word. Free! I, who was buried a century ago!

The grave was to give up its dead ! What a resurrection ! How plastic were events becoming under the influence of the demons ! Could anything be more convenient ? As head-nurse of the infirmary I should resume the right of speech. I should find Spevins there. If he were convalescent he must manage to have a relapse. It was no longer to be vague castle-building as to what we might do some day. He would be out in four years, I in five. I could not believe it now—the proposition was so novel, although we had discussed it often. During that first year, after coming out, he would have to keep dark—work at a trade—mislead the police as to the continuance of his burglarious proclivities, and set the train. Then Jaggs would go out ; then my turn would come. As I considered this I was haunted by a misgiving—only for an instant, though. By reviewing and reversing my sentence, had not those in authority atoned for the first wrong ? Had I still a right to make of myself a firebrand—a scourge ? Of course I had ! Was not my nature altered by what I had undergone ?—the milk of my humanity curdled—changed

to vinegar? A pretty thing to reverse the sentence when the harm was done! First, they locked me among devils and made a devil of me; then were prepared to turn me out with an admonition to sin no more. Sin no more, forsooth! I owed the world my hatred—complete and entire. There could be no opinion as to the justice of that. The results born of undying hate it should receive at my hands, without remorse or pity.

When he came in from labour Jaggs was all agog to know what was the news. I told him through the partition, and my good luck seemed to take away his spirits.

‘Going into the farm as croker’s head man!’ he observed, after a long period of softly modulated whistling. ‘The very berth for me; but there’s no justice in these hotels. Howsomever, there’s no good in weeping over that. Spevins is tucked up there jolly. You’re goin’ too. Do you think I’m going to be left behind? Not if I know it. Before a month’s out I’ll be there too.’

‘And he was as good as his word. I had not been a month installed in my new place before I received orders from the doctor to

prepare a bed in a comfortable position near the stove.'

'Was it a bad case?' I ventured to inquire.

'Rather, in that it was a disease which seldom showed itself at Dartmoor. A case of ophthalmia, which might turn to total blindness or not, according to treatment. It was brought on possibly through poverty of blood and disintegration of the colouring particles. It was a curious matter for diagnosis. The variety of forms that illness took, all of which were owing to the same cause, was marvellous—poverty of blood!'

'How did the doctor know that it was poverty of blood?' I asked.

He liked to air his knowledge, as all people do who do not know much. Moreover, he was a new-comer, and had a good deal of local experience to learn.

'Because there were other symptoms in the same patient which led him to that belief. For example, symptoms about the region of the eye that were distinctly ophthalmic; symptoms about the groin of incipient ulcer, undeveloped as yet, but certainly ulcer. The two phenomena together in the same

patient pointed at once to poverty of blood. Nothing could be plainer or more positive.'

This interesting patient was Jaggs, who was led in between two warders, old Scarraweg bringing up the rear in doubt. There had been a truce this long time past between the chief-warder and his pseudo-nephew. When I reformed, so also in a way did he. The same joke becomes wearisome if carried on for years. Jaggs was too volatile a person to hunt a joke to death; so he ceased calling the old man uncle, and the old man ceased his persecutions. But he had no idea of being hoodwinked. Experience had taught him that Jaggs would be a persistent malingerer if he could—that the pains he would have in his back and about the heart would be wondrous and phenomenal if not sternly nipped in the bud. But this was something so entirely different, and the effects, too, were visible, and the young doctor was so sure of its being a real case, that Scarraweg, suspicious all the while, was compelled to hold his tongue.

First Jaggs began to complain of darkness in his cell. The candles were so shockingly bad he could not see to read by them. Then

he bumped against railings, stumbled against steps, as if dim-sighted. By-and-by he fell out to see the croker, who noticed inflammation on the inner eyelid, and recommended lotions.

The governor's attention being drawn to the patient, he suggested that stone-dust from the quarry might have got into his eyes; yet that could scarcely be, since no one else had the same symptoms. Later, the astute scamp was reported for not keeping his tins clean.

'Upon my word and honour, sir,' he had declared, 'they are as clean as I can make 'em; I seem to see 'em through a mist-like.'

Again the doctor saw the sufferer: violent inflammation now, ophthalmic symptoms, etc., etc., sparseness of blood-particles, and so forth.

What was the chief-warder to do? He was pretty certain in his own mind that Jaggs was over sincere—that he was becoming too ingenuous and artless. If he were really ill, who so likely to cry out as he? Yet there were the symptoms, no one could deny that. All that he could do was to wait and

watch, and if he could catch the scapegrace, woe be to the gay deceiver !

But he was completely baffled. Jaggs was, as the late governor put it, of the lean kine. The more nourishment he took the weaker did he grow. In spite of succulent diet, this extraordinary blood of his seemed daily to grow thinner.

‘Tell us how you do it, old pal,’ I asked him, when he and I and Spevins were alone in the infirmary.

He looked up from under the green shade and rags which covered his reddened eyes, and with a grin slowly stealing over the expanse of his long hollow jaws, whispered :

‘Simple enough. Lime rubbed inside the eyelids does the trick. Ulcers? Oh, bless your simplicity! This strip of copper wire run under the skin and left there. You call it verdigris. I call it ulcers; and in my instance the two come to much the same thing in the end !

PART II.

THE GUARDIAN SPEAKS.





CHAPTER I.

THE CHIEF WARDER'S FIRST GROWL.



WELL, ladies and gents, here's luck to us all. I'm not much of a hand at this sort of thing, being but an old sea-dog, who's not more bright than most, but as honest as the day, thank the Lord, for all that. I can keep my books and suchlike shipshape enough, so as to satisfy them as are set in authority over me, which ain't easy ; and more than that I don't want or care about, do I ? But when I was in the Crimea and the Chaney seas I never thought as I'd ever come to live with the scum of the earth, locked up together day and night—they as cunning and as wicked as you please, and me jumping up in the night as nimble as a pea on a shovel at the least

noise, in case the rapsCALLIONS should be up to mischief. I never thought I'd come to this, that's sartain, when I was in the navy of our Gracious Queen, God bless her; for it was in her service, I'm proud to say, that I won my spurs, if I may say so without fear of being taken for a horse marine. But we drift into strange ports—my word!

You'll be wondering now what an old fellow like me, who knows more of a bowline-bridle than of a pen, has got with addressing you in print. If so be as you were to come to our prison with an order from the Secretary of State it'd be different, because, you see, you'd have come there of your own accord—I hope you'll never come there except of your own accord—and would be glad enough, I warrant, for a change, to listen to a yarn or two from the old chap whose medal was pinned on his breast by the own hands of her Gracious Majesty—but there, that's got nothing to do with this business, has it? Avast there! I look like goin' overboard. I've got a job to do, so I must do it; and here goes—head on to the breakers!

The manuscript you've just been reading came into my hands, no matter how—you'll find that out at the end. I see things in it as are true, and I see things in it as wear false colours, and I see things in it as make me sadder than usual, and my life's not all hornpipes, I can tell you, since I came into this service ; and so, instead of clapping on a shilling stamp and sending it off to the printer's by the post, I edge my word in just to trim the boat, as it were, and prevent your sailing away with a wrong impression of what goes on in prisons through the chatter of Jaggs and Spevins, and the wickedness of another as shall be nameless.

I took a queer liking for Ebenezer Anderson—that's Y 122—you know, soon after he joined. He was so different from the rest, and bore what he had to bear with a sort of sullen fortitude that I couldn't but respect, like the chap called Timon in the play. It's true he was always getting into scrapes, poor devil ! but there, there ! nobody knows what it is to be a convict till they try ; and I can speak with some authority, because to my

mind there's uncommon little difference between being a convict or a warder, except that the convict has had his larks before he came into prison and the warder hasn't. Our late guv'nor used to say as we was all of one stock ; and, upon my word, the lives we lead are very much alike. Anderson had a hot temper of his own. He says I have too, but don't you believe him when he says that. Many a time have I seen him go white and then red when spoken gruffly to, and the veins stand out on his forehead. My wonder is that he never broke out and struck somebody. That would have gained him a flogging, and then there would have been an end of him ; for sensitive chaps like he is don't undergo the cat and live. There's where the difficulty lies, you see. By our system we're bound to treat all alike ; and yet some are so different from others that what'll cure one will kill t'other. But I'm steering all askew again like a landlubber.

Ebenezer has told you how he became a good boy and gained the best berth in the ship, with a prospect of being paid off by-and-by. He went on first-rate till the end of his

term. During his last year he became a privileged man, wore the blue dress with red collar and cuffs, and went about where he liked—within the circle of civil guards. And our governor was very much interested in him—a splendid fellow our new governor—and everything went on like steam till the time worked round at last, and we packed him off from Horrabridge with a railway warrant to Millbank to have his final photo taken and for discharge, ‘lifer’ though he was. He was such a useful man that we missed him a good deal at first; but then there are always a lot of gentlemen lags—clerks and parsons and such like—who are sharp-witted and know that it’s their interest to behave themselves, and who therefore win the best places and all privileges; and I’m sorry to tell you—quite on the quiet—that in too many cases the best-behaved men are the worst at bottom. At this moment we’ve got nine red-collar men, and a greater lot of scoundrels, plausible, lying wretches—convicts ought to take out a patent for lying—you never were unlucky enough to see. But we can’t help that. Though we know them

to be capable of any blackguardism, we can't prevent their gaining privileges. They win all the marks, and they know the rules as well as we do ; and if we don't give 'em what they've earned there's a rare hullaballo, I can tell you. But as I was saying, Anderson went out ; and before he went out I asked him to write to me and say if I could do anything to keep him straight. A friend's a friend all the world over, even though he's only a prison warder, and many a chap's kept square by knowing that if he goes off the line somebody 'll grieve over it. So I presented him with my address and name on a bit of paper just as a reminder, and gave him a hearty shake of the hand as I wished him God speed. You should have seen the face of that Soda as he watched him going out. It made me laugh in spite of myself, it was so blank. I daresay he was thinking that it might have been better for himself if he had behaved himself ; but if he did think so he soon changed his mind, for he ran amuck that day and went on anyhow. A cowardly villain who could be brave if he had an admiring audience—that was the sort of scamp

he was, and a dangerous sort too, who work a deal of mischief. We had to send him back into 57 Party ; and one morning he bit a fellow-prisoner's thumb very badly, and so we had to put him to second probation during the remainder of his time, that is, solitary confinement, just like the first nine months ; and that takes the shine out of them, I assure you. It's no fun breaking rules and bearding the governor when you've got nobody to say brayvo.

We didn't keep him at Princetown—Lord bless you, no ! We sent him back to Pentonville ; and a pretty bother it was, he was so desperately wild. He did serious injury to two warders on the road, which made me remind the guv'nor of my advice at starting. A wretch like him, I said, ought to be tied up in a sack like a wild cat—aye, and drowned too, for the good of the world in general.

Let me see. Who else was there of Ebenezer's pals ? Spevins went out all right, and so did Jaggs ; but I expect my nevvv back shortly, the insolent rascal ! Jaggs was always a cunning card, and clever too, and

most owdaciously impudent. If Spevins manages to keep him well in tow, it's possible he may remain at large. But I doubt it. With all his cunning he's a feather-pated chap; and he was near being too cunning, by-the-bye, at last. All that lime on the eyelids did affect his sight after a while. Whether he'll get over it or not, I can't tell. Like all the rest of 'em, he was prepared to do anything almost rather than work—though some were worse than he was. And when they take that line in earnest, they beat you by sheer obstinacy, just as donkeys do. There's Bidwell now, the American forger. He was as right as you or I when he came in, but from the first he refused to do anything. He wouldn't even walk, and had to be carried about like a babby. At this blessed minute he is sitting up in bed at Princetown with his knees up to his chin, and oh! such a villanous scowl! And there he'll stop to the end of the chapter. Our sawbones says as he's really lost the use of his limbs by this time, from want of use. But he don't care, bless you! He's lost all chance of remission long ago, and he's beat

his keepers. That small triumph is enough for him. I've known men—*under short sentences, too!*—make themselves hopeless cripples for the rest of their lives rather than obey orders. One man, only t'other day, ran a needle into each eye and blinded himself for ever, and he only in for seven years.

What are you to do with men like him? Are they to be pitied and petted? Can you treat 'em as human beings? Philanthropical gents come and see us sometimes, and talk a power of nonsense; and tell us that it's despair does it. 'Tain't nothing of the kind. The well-educated felons never dream of doing such a thing, though they may be 'lifers,' or, at least, long-sentence men. Sometimes they commit suicide, but that's another matter. The men that blind and mutilate themselves are, one and all, men of a low type—who never look to a future—think only of the actual moment which they are passing through, and which they feel to be unpleasant and galling. There are heaps of men like that; it's a form of madness, if you please. How are

you going to reform men of that stamp? It's rubbish. All you can do is to lock them up and prevent them, at least, from hurting any but themselves. Experience has taught me that more than half the convicts are really mad after a fashion; and so, being beyond their own control, are beyond the reach of reformatory influence.

I think Ebenezer suggested somewhere, that everybody has a tile off. Well, convicts have lost several, while you and I have only lost one. We're all more prone to evil than good, and some of these chaps have a perfect genius for wickedness. All geniuses are said to be a trifle mad, ain't they? If they weren't a trifle mad, they would not possess the wild enthusiasm which, as I read once in a book, is called 'sacred fire.' My word, some of our fellows have fire, but I'm not so sure about its being sacred; and while we're about it, here's another theory of mine. When a man comes in, I always examine his head, on the first opportunity, to see if there's a scar on it. If there is, I say to myself—you've tumbled down, my hearty, or had a knock sometime that has muddled

your brain. You'll never do any good. You're a gaol-bird for life; and I make a note of him for a friend of mind in Scotland Yard, because I know he'll have something to do with him some day, and private notes of the kind come in handy. Take my word for it, there's one type of felon who would never have gone crooked if his brain had not been muddled by a blow. He begins badly, and reasons crooked, and is fretted by trifles, and degenerates little by little till his name and address, and the marks upon his person, become part and parcel of the 'black register.' You can't reform him any more than you can turn a cow into an antelope; and yet there are philanthropic gents, who'd make me laugh if they didn't rile me, who come and preach to men of this stamp; and pay out yards of platitude, enough to make you poorly. Oh, those philanthropic gents, who are prepared to teach everybody how they should behave! We can't, of course, prevent their worriting, but their existence is amongst the heaviest of our many trials.

They are always poking their noses in and finding fault, and knowing our business

so much better than we do ourselves. Isn't that queer, now? No one who hasn't learnt the art would go to a hospital and insist on cutting off a leg; yet they're all dying to manage a country, or the police force, or else the prisons; while they know no more about it than my old retriever Jack—him as that swab Jaggs tormented. But we mustn't be cross. We must live and let live. Many idle people live by philanthropy, just as others do by organ-grinding. Its easy work, and riling to others, which is a satisfaction in itself; and if you only grind long enough they'll pay you anything to get rid of you. Oh, the members of the philanthropical societies as have worritted me! But it's the London prisons that suffer most in that line. At Princetown we're too far for 'em. But when they do come, I always look pleasant and show 'em round, and don't listen to their gabble. With the secretaries, now, it's quite a different thing. It's a regular profession, they've bread to earn for wife and brats. If they don't worm out a grievance, and kick up a dust so many times a year, their committee's down on 'em for want of

zeal; so when a philanthropical secretary comes bothering, and talking nonsense, and making idiotic objections, I say to myself—Scarraweg, old man, think of the brats and wife, and bear with the idiot, and don't be in a tantrum. It's their bread and butter he's got to earn, and more often than enough he's too muddleheaded an old fool to earn it any other way. Anyhow, it's more honest than thieving. Let him wear his sham 'Love for the Human Race,' and flaunt it like a yellow bandanna wipe, and welcome. I'd rather see him occupied over this, paltry job as it is, than working in our gangs.

Bless my dear eyes! when I begin to think of the ways of convicts—of their deliberate manner of running sideways—of the difficulty of judging of what's true and what's not—of the myriad cases where they take us in, be we ever so experienced—I could go on yarning all night. There is so much variety; their cunning is so prodigious; and yet the philanthropic secretaries, who look in for a cursory survey, insist they're as simple as A B C. Are they? It's all

of a piece with the religious servant-maid in the Edgware Road, who stops you of a Sunday to ask after your soul. It's a form of human vanity—a vulgar contemptible form, which should bring upon the contemptible person retribution in the shape of kicks. But then, as I consider of this, I remember that some of our own chaplains have gravely announced in their reports, that 'a proper combination of punishment with moral training, will reclaim any but the utterly depraved.' Oh, indeed! Not to put too fine a point on it, that's bunkum. There are chaplains and chaplains. Some are men who really try to tread in the footprints of their Master; others have the frankness to admit that they don't desire to do anything of the sort. Some do their duty; some are given to wind. But then, again, one bit of duty which can't be escaped, is the making of annual reports. It's needful to write something, and, as nobody reads it, it doesn't matter what it is; and so with them, as with the philanthropic secretaries, we must be indulgent.

The utterly depraved, forsooth! The

types of British felon that I could tell you of are legion. There's one lot which, through drink and neglect of such minds as they were given, have reduced themselves to semi-imbecility. All they have left is a perverted kind of instinct, not so readable as that of the beast; and this instinct of theirs tells them to be comfortable if they can. How will you reform this lot, any more than those who can't comprehend a future? It's hard they should be condemned to suffer, but it would be more hard if they were allowed to feed upon the innocent. Then there are the dodgy-ones—like Jaggs—who'd ruin the temper of a Gabriel, let alone poor warders, who, the philanthropists say, ought to be archangels, but ain't.

After Jaggs left us, a weak, puny, purposeless creatur in the farm (that's the infirmary) took to playing the same pranks as his. He scratched the lime from the wall and rubbed it in his eye; but it was painful, and he hadn't resolution to go on. So one night, as I went my rounds, he pulled me by the coat-tail, while the rest were asleep, and whined out :

‘The Lord has been pleased to partially restore my sight. Do you know, I think you could complete the cure by putting me to light labour in the kitchen.’

What do ye think of a transparent scamp like that? Don’t dodges such as these crumble in a honest man’s mouth like six year old sea - biscuits? It makes me poorly to think over some of ’em. And then, when the philanthropical secretaries come smirking in, it’s as much as I can do to prevent my tongue from saying what I think. Tantrums ’ll get me into bilin’ water some day, and if so be as they do, why I can’t help it.

Then you have the sneaking men of the costermonger class, who are more comfortable than they ever hoped to be, and who make it their amusement—a light and congenial relaxation—to bother the officers in charge, and, as it were, stick pins in them. Many a smart young warder has been brought to ruin by one of these. Mischief ’s the only thing they’ll never shirk. They’re always laying traps for the smart young warder, hoping to catch him tripping and get him under their

thumb. The case that Ebenezer tells of the letters and papers going out is strictly true, and a common enough case in all prisons. The young chap's proud of his smart uniform, and full of contempt for the leering ape with the cropped pate ; but he doesn't remember that that monkey's wits, which were rendered acute in childhood by the emptiness of his stomach, are sharpened still more now by malice and having nothing else but mischief for those wits to work on.

Then you have the out-and-outers with no intellect at all—not even the sane instinct that points to comfort—who mumble up and down their cells, and make faces at the wall, and grin and shake a fist at their tin-platters. I've stood sometimes staring at these animals through the peephole—they not knowing they were watched—till they made my blood run cold. Their only idea seems to be a craving to do harm, regardless of the evil which may accrue to themselves. Set 'em to work, and they'll smash their implements. They'll tear their clothes and blankets if you don't look out, and fling their pans about merely to annoy their neighbours. They've

as little idea of self-interest as of punishment ; and yet, as they can talk sensibly when the fit seizes them, they can't be certified for lunatics.

Then—and this is the melancholy lot—you have the gentlemen lags, who've really been led astray, or really may possibly be suffering for some one else's crime—mere catspaws whose sin was that as pipkins they were too fragile to swim with iron pots. These desolate and dreary men used to bring moisture into my eyes sometimes till I got used to 'em. I was a long time learning that I must not have feelings ; but I have learnt it now, or hope at least I have. For us the blessed stars are clouded over—we're scudding in the dark under stormsails for the harbour ; and when we heave to behind the breakwater, I for one shall not be sorry.

And now that the clouds have dropped down on me a bit, I think with foreboding of yet another class, some of whose penal sheets are lying in yonder cupboard—penal sheets which will be overhauled at Judgment Day, to the detriment, unless I'm much mistaken, of others than those whose names they

bear. I never can look upon those penal sheets without a shudder—for if ever there was a wrong inflicted by one set of erring mortals on another, that wrong is inflicted day after day upon such men as these. It ain't our fault—that is, the fault of the convict system and its servants. We have men sent to us, and we have to treat 'em as the law directs that felons should be treated. It's the fault of those who send 'em to us, and, as a Christian man, I hope that their sin in so doing may be treated with more mercy and indulgence than they themselves have shown, anyway. I would not have the wrong they do upon my conscience—not for all the worldly wealth of all the Indies! Oh dear! oh dear! much as I abhor the sight of those penal records, I'll pull out a batch of 'em, and let 'em tell their pitiful story.

Here's Will Fern—a soldier of marines, who was tried by general court-martial for insubordination, and sentenced to five years' penal servitude. A fine, handsome, open-faced young fellow he is—what was his crime? He used threatening language to an officer, and for that is made a felon. *And*

a real felon, mark you, in the end. The fact of his being sentenced turned him out of the army. Here is his vellum discharge pinned to the penal sheet. By-and-by he will go out on license—*a convict on ticket-of-leave.* Will anybody of whom he demands work ask what his antecedents were, or what his sin?—of course not. A gaol-bird—that's enough. He has been taken by the scruff of the neck and wilfully plunged, by persons who call themselves officers and gentlemen, into a whirlpool of dirt, out of which, being friendless, he can never possibly struggle any more. His crime was a purely military crime, which, out of military circles, is the most commonplace of offences—one which as a civilian would have possibly brought on him a fine of five shillings. If the military choose to hold up certain breaches of discipline as crimes, they should see that those who commit such breaches are shut up in a separate military prison where they will meet only such delinquents as themselves, and from which the men will emerge *soldiers still*, with characters not utterly blasted—unstained by the mark of the broad arrow.

But no ! they are sent to us to be mixed pell-mell with the murderers and pickpockets and ravishers and committers of every filthy offence on earth—to be educated in the new school, and turned out at last no better than their companions. I've spoken of this once or twice to gents, and they wouldn't believe that in Christian modern England of the nineteenth century such wholesale murder was every day being openly committed. For it is wholesale murder—not of the body but of the soul ; and, as I said afore, I wouldn't have such crimes upon my conscience for—well, never mind. And the behaviour of many of the poor wretches cries out to God against the mustachioed, pomatomed gentlemen who sent them where they are—gentlemen who, possibly, are astonished and amazed when I show 'em what they're doing. Some of the poor fellows go quite wrong, as may be expected ; some, and not a few, actually succeed in resisting temptation, in spite of the hopelessness of their case from the moment they come inside our walls. My old heart bleeds when I look at 'em, and I groan when I think of 'em ; and my gorge

revolts against the gay young officers who sit on the court-martials and doom their fellow-men to perdition for nothing at all—it does, upon my honour, old salt though I be, who ought to know summat of what discipline is. But they don't know what they're doing. For the Lord's sake let us give 'em the benefit of the doubt, and in the same holy name beg and implore those who should look to these things, and whose disgrace and shame it is that such things should be, to see that the foul wrong is done no more. There are lots of 'em just like Fern, poor fellow! who are out now. What's become of them I know not, and think it wisest not to inquire; but here are some more who are not out—one or two only selected from a list of hundreds—who are all languishing while I write and while you read; men innocent of civil crime, yet herded with the scum in civil prisons; men in whom hope dies daily—who are in some sort justified in going to the bad by reason of the cruel injustice of their fate!

I won't weary you, but I'll turn over another record or two and see what they

say. There's Robson (these are all feigned names, but real cases, and I have the real names in my own ledger dotted down). Then there's Davis, who always bore an excellent character, which is endorsed by his conduct since he went to Wormwood Scrubbs. Absolutely a clean sheet—not a single complaint of any kind! Under influence of a glass too much he was guilty of insubordination and attempted violence—only attempted; and for that he has been sentenced to penal servitude for no less than seven years! What do the kind angels who are up in heaven think of that? Then there's Wall of the 80th Regiment, who for desertion and re-enlisting has got five years. His report sheet again is clean. Then there's McFadden—insubordination and violence when under drink. He belonged to the Buffs. His prison conduct, too, is absolutely beyond reproach. But there! the horrible wickedness and injustice of such a condition of things makes me quite sick with indignation. 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!' In a pious and humble spirit, I re-echo those sacred words, and pray whilst so doing that

I may live to see this crying wrong abolished. I'm only thankful to heaven that neither I nor anyone concerned in our system are in any way responsible. But let us return to summat less lugubrious—the genuine gaol-bird and his funny little ways.

Now, talking of crime and criminals in classes, I'll tell ye a queer thing which is true. If you were to take the towns of England in the order of the percentage of criminals they turn out, which would you put first, the big towns or the little ones? You'd put London first, I'll bet a dollar; then Manchester, or Liverpool, or Birmingham. Of course it stands to reason that the largest masses of humanity should produce the largest numbers of habitual criminals. Think of the dens in the Dials and the Cut, and Short's Gardens too! You'd make the bet, wouldn't you? Well, then, just send me that dollar in stamps, by the post; for you've taken the bet, and lost. There's an average of fifteen or sixteen thousand habitual criminals in England and Wales, and fourteen hundred receivers of stolen goods. The towns which turn out the largest numbers of

incorrigible gaol-birds are (in their order of iniquity): Stafford, Worcester, Taunton, Lancaster, Hereford. The wickedest town (Stafford) can boast of only 16,000 inhabitants; the criminal rate per 1,000 is 1·881. The most virtuous town is Oldham, whose criminal rate is only ·3 per 1,000, its population averaging 113,000. London, despite its huge size and its awful slums, stands amazingly low, considering. Its population, about three or four years back, was reckoned at three and a half millions, while its criminal rate per 1,000 was only ·461. These are curious statistics, which were worked out by Captain Harvey, the present governor of Millbank. Another queer thing that he took the trouble to work out, was the average of crime in single or married persons, with this result :

Per cent. of married males	32· 8
Per cent. of single males	67· 2
Per cent. of married females	59·12
Per cent. of unmarried females ...	40·88

Hence you see that what's called the 'blissful state' seems to have a good effect on men and a bad effect on women, which is

rum ; and that sets me a-thinking further of the influence which one sex may be supposed to have on t'other. The married women (innocent creeters, as long as they're single) are corrupted by their husbands, which is only a fair tit-for-tat for the way Eve behaved once on a time ; while no less than half the bachelors pull themselves together and become good boys when they assume the dignity of paterfamilias. Now I'm a bachelor myself, and always was, for the wives of sailors do come to awful grief ; and yet somehow I don't regret it, crabbed old devil that I am ; and that's rum too, isn't it ?

Ah ! You've thought all along, I dare say, that I was a cross old curmudgeon ; one of them who, like the convicts, are allays howling for what they can't get, and are never satisfied. But it's not so. I'm humbly grateful to God for His goodness to me through all my life, and in my increasing age. I'm thankful for a roof over my head, and a cosy fire—even such a roof as this. I've got a stocking put by somewheres, I won't deny, so could go and live anywhere ; but what we

old fellows want is, *not to die alone*. I've no family, and no kith nor kin ; and, though old, I'm energetic. What brings many of us to this is a desire for employment quite as much as money ; and employment at our age, with our capacities, is no easy matter to find. Old sailors and old soldiers make the best warders, because they're accustomed to strict discipline ; and old sailors and old soldiers in want of employment can't afford to be squeamish. Their battered hulks are no longer seaworthy, so they must submit to be anchored in the mud, and put to what use they can. But on my sacred word, I'd no more allow my sister's son—not even my third cousin's, ever so many times removed—to become a prison warder, than—Well, there, I can't find anything strong enough.

If anything goes wrong, it's the warder's fault. He's too lenient, or too severe, according to the view of the person who abuses him. He must have eyes all over his back, as well as in front ; be always on the watch, always sweet-tempered, never ill or captious, and never sleepy. He must be vigilant to

detect disobedience ; always truthful, never exaggerate ; be always on the look-out lest he should be stabbed or thrown down a cliff, or pitched over a stair-rail. He must be up at five, and get no rest till nine at night ; rarely take a holiday ; be the butt and victim of ingenious prisoners ; the scapegoat of officers above him. And all this for eighty pounds a year, out of which he's constantly being fined sixpences for being a minute behind time. It's a life of awful wearing, tearing, responsibility, and no adequate return. If he's caught the worse for drink, his certificates are cancelled and he's ruined. If he's found talking to a prisoner, it's taken for granted that he's conspiring with him ; his certificates are cancelled, and he's ruined. He's always got ruin staring him in the face, and, whatever happens, no one's sorry for his fate. My wonder is that decent men, who respect themselves, submit to such a state of things, and that respectable persons can be found to undertake the job. But there the difficulty of finding honest work at all steps in. That warders, as a rule, are respectable men, anyone who knows anything about them

can see with half an eye. As to bullying by warders, a search through a bunch of penal records will prove that there's little of that. Dozens of them (belonging in many cases to murderers and violent-tempered men), are free for years of any reports at all. Sometimes a man will get reported, all of a sudden, half a dozen times in a month. The governor sees directly that there's a screw loose somewhere, and moves that man into another warder's charge, when the reports will be pretty sure to cease. Men, being human, will take dislikes; but it's seldom, and the governors are on the watch.

If you want archangels, you must pay for 'em, and I believe they're expensive to keep. I doubt whether Michael or Raphael, or Gabriel, would think it quite worth while to leave his berth aloft to live on the wilds of Dartmoor upon eighty pounds a year and fines. The governors, for their own credit's sake, would stop all bullying and quarrelling at once, for they want to keep their prison quiet. But even if the governor did not keep his eyes open (which is a ridiculous assumption, for governors are carefully se-

lected), the prisoner would have heaps of ways of getting himself righted.

He can get at the deputy-governor at any time, or, if he's afraid of a warder's vengeance for complaining, he can get closeted with the chaplain (who always goes when sent for), or the doctor, and get his complaint put privately; or if a governor were even to have a spite against him and pay no attention, he can always memorialise, by petition, the Secretary of State; and no governor or official would dare to tamper with such a paper, for one of the board of directors comes round now and again (who is quite irrespective of the governor), and besides, the prisoner would be sure to make an outcry when he gained his freedom.

But avast there! I'm losing my reckoning again, for I never could abear to hear geese gabbling about what they don't understand. Independent of his own honour and integrity, it's the governor's interest to let prisoners air their grievances. If men know that they can appeal, if they like, to a higher court, it makes 'em more content, and hence less difficult to manage. It's like the safety-valve in

the engine. We may not use it, but we know it's there and that we shan't blow up, and it makes us easy in our minds.

And that brings me to summat with regard to complaints that does make me poorly. It's that summat that drove me to quilldriving, and it must be summat desperately serious to make me do that, let me tell you. I daresay I don't make myself as clear as I'd like. I'd steer a vessel, with her gun-wales down to the edge, across the wide Atlantic, better nor I can steer this blessed pen over this blessed page. But if I don't sort my ideas as compact as I'd stow my traps in my sea-chest, it ain't my fault, and you must bear with me.

That summat that makes me poorly is the recollection of the Reverend Mr. Tilgoe. Ebenezer says somewhere, that if we had known what was a-going on, he'd have had a bad time.

Ebenezer's right. He would. I hope I'm as good a Christian as such a humble chap as me can expect to be ; but, somehow, I don't feel Christian when I think of that reverend parson ; and I do dearly hope that he'll do

summat wrong again—and soon. That infamous, soft-soldering, deceitful fellow! I read him through all along, but not to the depth of his infamy. Shortly after his release, his book came out, and, queerly enough, three other convict books came out in different parts of the country at the same time. Mr. Tilgoe is very severe upon the governor, who was so kind to him; he states facts which are no facts, trusting that (as governors can't demean their dignity by defending themselves against convicts) his lies will never be disproved. Well, there! There isn't a page of his book which is not open to contradiction, which perhaps is natural considering that he's an ex-convict. But what makes me poorly isn't so much him. Felons of his mean kind must be expected to misbehave. But what stirs my inside till I feel green about the gills, *is the way the public believe him!* Yes; that's the bitter part.

If you take the trouble to sift any one of these convict's books, what do their complaints amount to, taking into consideration that

they'll be sure to make the worst of everything? even supposing that all that's said is true, which it isn't by at least half, what then? In one book I find much stress laid upon the awful fact that men were stripped in each other's presence. That was true; but in deference to an over-sensitive public the practice has been done away *altogether*, and *in all prisons*. But what is it after all? Don't people do the same every day of their own accord in swimming baths and in the sea, when warm enough? And yet they're none the worse for it, because, perhaps, their imaginations are not quite so low as those of felons. Well! we'll admit, if you like, that convicts are over-sensitive; that the finer feelings are more fully developed in one whom society has expelled, than in a mere honest man. The grievance has been met, and the thing abolished; and I think we ought to be pleased with ourselves that the particular convict who wrote that particular book, couldn't find anything to pick holes in that was more grave. But some are less conscientious than he. One rascal, for instance, aware how little the public can know of prison

rules or discipline, rakes up grievances *which ceased to exist years ago*, and flaunts them, like union jacks, to try and make people buy his rubbish. Oh ! and the silly suggestions they make—they who can only see the prison business from the convict-side—and the impudent way they lay down the law ! Ain't it enough to make a Cheshire cat laugh when you come to think of it ? Here's one idiot who says in a newspaper (I think it was *Tilgoe*, it's so like his asinine conceit), that a dreadful grievance from the point of view of the taxpayer (he thinks this clever, but it's not), is the number of officials who have to be paid and are not wanted. (As it happens, when the classification comes, of which more by-and-by, we shall want twice as large a staff and several new prisons ; and this same classification will have to be seen to shortly.) And what does he suggest as a means of cutting down the 'unnecessary number of officials ?' He says that an 'efficient governor' should do all supervising work himself, and that the existence of deputy-governors is a robbery of the British public. Efficient governors, then, are to sprout up ready-made ;

to undergo no apprenticeship ; but to be carted out of a regiment straight, without being expected to learn their business under experienced superiors ! Oh, the silly jackass ! One convict writer says, and very obliging of him, I'm sure : ' In justice to the governors of convict prisons with whom I came in contact, I must say I believe them to be an extremely temperate body of men, and so of course are nearly all the chaplains, and a majority of the medical officers.' And the man who is allowed by a respectable newspaper to write thus of his keepers, was kicked out of society for one of—well, there ! He probably tells you, the British public, that he made a little slip, and you'd believe it, so what's the use of my taking up here and there what he says ? He's a splendid judge, no doubt, of the temperate and gentlemanly behaviour of the chief officers of the prisons, whose business it has been to give him bread and water. I've heard it said that people, when they are in droves—that is when they become ' British public '—are so glad to throw upon each other the responsibility of deciding about anything, that

they, more often than not, behave like zanies because nobody will take it on himself to say straight off: 'This is right, or this is wrong.' That's how it is that folks are so gulled by advertising sharpers—A, B and C take shares in this or that, therefore it may be taken for granted that they have looked into the question, and it must be all square; and D will do the same without thinking it necessary to examine for himself. This is all right enough, maybe, because the British public holds the purse, and if it likes to pay sixpence halfpenny for a worthless article, there's nothing to be said. B. P. is swindled, and B. P. suffers for its folly. Therefore we may say—I hope I put it plain enough, but it's not easy to make all taut and trim—that the B. P. in the abstract is a fool, and that those who every now and then pretend to guide it have a heavy responsibility on their shoulders, which they ought not to accept unless they take the trouble to comprehend what they decide on. Now I'm coming to it—I'm so artful—you don't know yet how artful! *It's the newspapers I'm coming to!* now it's out! It's the press as I complain of in the matter of

Tilgoe and all the other canting humbugs. By the manner in which many of 'em have behaved over the convict question, and the convict authors' books, they've stultified themselves, and shown how little they can be trusted as sure guides. We all know the editorial 'we;' and the very tiny frog that often shouts itself hoarse in pretending to be a bull, trusting that the smallness of its little figure will be hidden by the big cloak in which it wraps itself. Well, it's much the same with the convict literature. The respectable convict avoids publicity, and is only too glad to slink away into the dark.

The cleverish 'bad lot' who has been a fraudulent attorney or worse, seizes the pen, which he knows how to send spluttering, as a petty sort of revenge, being aware that neither public nor newspaper reviewers know anything whatsoever of what he's jabbering of. These noospapers do a deal of harm that way, and ought to be slapped upon the knuckles for not being more careful. I've seen noospapers as should know better, reviewing these convict books gravely—without a shade of doubt of their veracity—

just as though the writer hadn't qualified himself for understanding his subject by being a blackguard, and having no character to speak of. These papers who are so culpably careless, and who pretend to teach the muddle-headed—I beg pardon, I'm sure, meaning the *many*-headed—are playing the part of the blind leading the blind into the ditch, and when I see 'em do it I feel bilious. Is that clear?

This new-fangled convict literature is a new and shocking form of penny dreadful, which does no end of injury, as all falsehood does that's dressed up like truth. On the principle of Titania and Bottom (I used to be a great playgoer when in port), they look on Bill Sykes as a gent in holy orders led astray in a moment of delirium. The public mind is given to taking up unhealthy fashions, and here's one of them. Thieves and assassins are likely to become the rage. They're to be petted, and pampered, and pitied, poor dear interesting vagabonds; but no one thinks of pitying the people they robbed, and whose throats they've cut, or the no less unhappy people who've been set to keep them out of

mischief; of course the authorities and their charges clash, and always must; for one is the emblem of discipline, and the other of disorder. It's all very well to show a picturesque interest in the dear criminals; but the public ought to remember that by taking their part against their keepers, as they have done and are doing, they weaken the authority of law and order, and become moral accomplices of those same ruffians whom their own chosen representatives have handed over for incarceration. I'd have you observe well, ladies and gents, that each of the four felon writers begins by saying that he made a slip—that otherwise he was a most respectable, and church-going person, and an honour to the sanctity of the saintly world in which he moved. Now I happen to know what the 'little slips' of some of these gentlemen were. I've nothing to do with the rest, just now; only with the Reverend Aurelius, because he happened to be under my own charge, and tells falsehoods about me. Well, I shan't tell you what his crime was, it would make me blush. Think of the meanest, dastardliest, most cowardly thing

that a grown man (of good education, too, more shame to him!) can do to an unfortunate class of females, by nature and by profession weak. It wasn't murder, and it wasn't forgery. Puzzle your brains now for yourselves; I shan't say more. It was not even his first offence, and, thank goodness, not likely to be his last. When the clergy do wrong, they somehow go all lengths—just as refined ladies who become insane use frightful language. The Reverend Aurelius has been already twice convicted; on his second trial there were many charges against him of the same shameful order, but it was only necessary to go into one. Wait till we have him again, that's all! Meanwhile, I would say to you, ladies and gents, that you should not read a convict's book with the intention of believing it, unless it is plainly stated (and well authenticated too), without names mentioned of course, *what his crime was*. Let it be stated in black and white upon the binding, and the truth of the statement vouched for. If you know that, you will be able to judge what faith to put in the statements of the writer. But no! He

begins always by talking about the 'little slip.' That bears falsehood on its face, and should be enough ; and the precious trash should go into the wastepaper-basket, instead of being devoured with a morbid interest in the yelpings of the interesting despicable hound.

There now, after that I'll wipe my forehead and pull up my collar and take a rest—for somehow I feel decidedly better.

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